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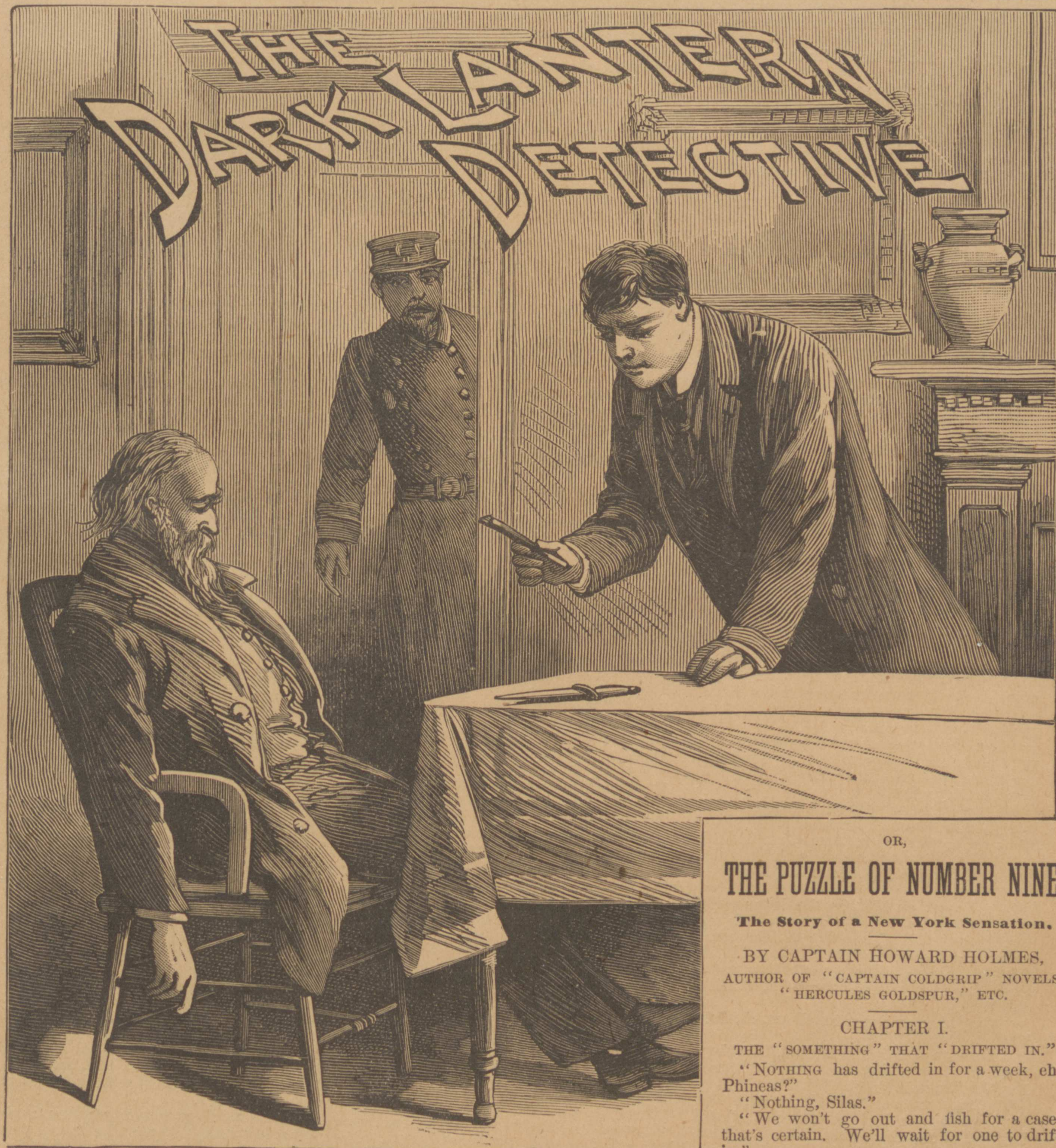
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OR,

THE PUZZLE OF NUMBER NINE.

The Story of a New York Sensation.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSBUR," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE "SOMETHING" THAT "DRIFTED IN."
"Nothing has drifted in for a week, eh,
Phineas?"

"Nothing, Silas."

"We won't go out and fish for a case,
that's certain. We'll wait for one to drift
in."

"We'll wait, Silas."

WAS IT THE SHEATH OF THE BLADE THAT DID THE TERRIBLE DEED?

The two men relapsed into silence. Tracer stirred the coals on the grate and looked across the table at his partner, who was writing a letter on a very small sheet of paper.

They composed a strange firm. It was known everywhere as Tripp and Tracer, and these two men had solved more criminal puzzles than any dozen of the best detectives in New York.

No one could tell how they had come together; they must have been drawn toward each other by the natural course of events; anyhow, they had formed a partnership, and for several years had tracked evil-doers all over the country.

Silas Tracer was a tall man with a sallow complexion and deep-set eyes. His hands were long and very thin, but they had a grip which was the bane of the guilty. His face was smooth and bony, and his gait, when in a hurry, was quick and nervous. Yet this man could be as cool and deliberate as the best of them, and when he seemed most eager to wind up a case, it was believed that he was the furthest from the close, such an admirable control he had over his bundle of nerves.

Phineas Tripp was the pigmy of the firm.

He was scarcely five feet in height and his little body would never fill the office chair which he always took.

But Tripp had a head for unraveling things.

It was said that Tripp thought and Tracer acted; that Tripp planned and Tracer executed.

Whichever way it was, we know they seldom went wrong and that when they came to certain conclusions, the guilty always fell into the net.

It was a maxim with this firm of man-hunters never to drum up trade.

Enough came to them without this; they always waited for something to "drift in" as they expressed it.

It was a cold day in March when Tracer made the remarks that open this story.

The streets of New York were white with snow and a cold wind blew up from the Battery, making the pedestrians duck and shiver.

It was nine o'clock in the morning and the two detectives sat in a warm room which could bid defiance to the elements without.

When Tripp folded the letter which he had written to a little niece, the only living person for whom he seemed to have any affection, a footstep came up-stairs and stopped at the door.

Was something about to drift in?

"Come in!" called out Tracer.

The door opened and the slim, sad looking Tracer smiled.

"Come in, Bobbles!" he said. "You look cold. Take a seat at the fire and tell us how the weather is outside."

Bobbles was a boy who might have been sixteen. He was the only person who visited the detectives with any regularity, and every now and then he slept in the office when the nights were very cold and the two man-hunters were out.

"You don't appear to have heard of it yet," remarked the boy as he drew alongside the fire and rubbed his hands.

"Heard of what?"

"Why, of the murder on the avenue? I happened in the neighborhood awhile ago—I was up to Edith's, you see—and when I came along I saw a crowd in front of the house and they said some one had been killed in there."

Tripp went on folding the letter while Tracer watched the boy, who continued:

"It's in Number Nine—the big old house near the angle of the avenue. I don't know who lives there, but I guess Edith could have told me if I had gone back, which I didn't."

"No, you came down to tell us, eh, Bobbles?"

"Yes—to tell you," nodded the boy. "Haven't they told you yet? Why, it must have happened last night."

The two ferrets exchanged glances.

"I guess you had better go up," said Tripp looking across the table. "Something has drifted in."

Silas made no reply, but got into his overcoat at once.

"I think there's where Legare lives," remarked Tripp, as Silas put on his hat.

"The Legare we worked up that gold case for two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Will you stay here, Bobbles?"

The fire felt good and the boy thought he would remain, if Tripp offered no objections.

Later the tall figure of Silas Tracer appeared on a certain avenue and at length reached the front steps of a house which was destined to furnish the detectives with the greatest puzzle of the day.

The place was in charge of a sergeant of police, who recognized him as he entered.

"This is something sure enough," observed the officer, "but you will have to look for threads with all eyes if you want to pick anything up here."

"What has happened?"

The sergeant nodded toward a room on the left.

"You will find him in there," he went on.

"No one knows him, and the girl who discovered him dead in the house can give no clue to his identity."

Tracer opened the door and walked into a room slightly darkened.

Besides a figure apparently reclining in an arm-chair, he was the only tenant of then place. He went toward this figure and looked at it.

It was that of a man of perhaps sixty. The face was white and ghastly and the arms hung down the sides of the chair. The hair was white, and the beard, which was quite luxuriant, was almost so. There was a look of refinement on the face which the ferret could see was strangely contorted, as if with sudden pain.

On the table lay a sheathless dagger, the point of which was as keen as that of a needle.

While he took in these things he was interrupted by a footstep and the sergeant came up behind him.

"They've left things here pretty much as they found them," said the officer, "Perhaps they should have left the dagger sticking in the breast as it was discovered by Miss Lockwood, but Grabben pulled it out and left it on the table yonder. You can see that there was a slight struggle. The carpet is somewhat ruffled at your feet and the ink was spilled."

"Beyond that nothing, eh?"

"About nothing, sir," the policeman assured.

"And you say that no one seems to know the man?"

"No one. He came to the house last night, so the maid in charge says, and wanted to take it for three months. You see Royal Legare lives here, but he went to Cuba to spend the first two months of spring, and advertised for a renter. Well, this man, whoever he is, applied last night at six o'clock and asked leave to sleep in the house before he took it, and the maid gave him that permission. But perhaps you prefer to get the story first-handed."

"Where is the maid?"

"In her room."

"Is she the Miss Lockwood to whom you have referred?"

"She's the lady."

Tracer looked once more at the dead man in the chair and went out.

Sergeant Filley showed him where the girl's room was and he knocked. The door was opened and he looked into the face of a young girl of twenty, trim and pretty, but a little flurried over the tragedy.

Silas Tracer walked into the snug room which she was occupying at the time and addressed her politely.

"The sergeant tells me that you are Miss Lockwood," said he.

"That is my name and you—"

"My name is Silas Tracer, miss."

She seemed not to have heard of the firm of Tripp and Tracer, for she did not start at mention of a name so well known, but asked him to be seated, saying in the same breath that she was willing to tell all she knew about the crime.

Tracer let her go on and tell her story.

It was to the effect that the dead man had called at the house at six the previous night in response to an advertisement which Royal Legare had caused to be in-

serted in the newspapers. He (Legare) did not care to let the house remain idle during his absence and thought it best to get a tenant who would take care of it for at least two months.

The unknown man stated to Miss Lockwood that if the house suited him, he would bring his daughter the next day and that they would take it until the owner's return.

"He looked like a nice old man, though somewhat reserved, and I acceded to his request to sleep in the house, for he said he always tried houses in that way before he occupied them. He seemed to go to bed at ten o'clock, for I heard the door of the red room locked and concluded of course that he had retired. I slept well and didn't hear a single noise. When I came down stairs this morning at eight I found the door of the left parlor opened and went in to discover that my guest was dead in his chair with the handle of a dagger driven close to his bosom."

"Were you the only person in the house last night excepting of course the dead man?"

The girl hesitated a moment.

"No, sir. Mr. Legare has an adopted son who came in some time after I had retired and went direct to his room which is on the third floor back."

"Where is he now?"

"He didn't remain long, for I perceive that his bed wasn't tumbled."

"Oh, he went out again last night?"

"Yes."

"Does he keep late hours?"

"Sometimes. I am quite sure I heard him come in and that was the end of it. He didn't go down to the parlor, he never does, for he seems to like nothing on the lower floor."

"What is the young man's name?"

"Garish Legare."

"And he hasn't shown up since you heard him come in last night?"

"He has not, but the moment he hears of this terrible tragedy he will come back. I am quite sure of that, for if he is a little wild, he is the soul of honor and no one can say anything very bad about Garish Legare."

Silas Tracer left the maid and began to look through the house.

He was shown how to reach the young man's room and in a little while he opened the door leading to it. The shutters were drawn and he opened them.

It was just as the girl had said—the bed had not been slept in the night before.

As the rich morning light flooded the room the detective saw something that lay at the foot of the bed on the floor.

In another moment he had picked it up and held in his hand the ornamented sheath of a dagger.

Almost at the same time he caught sight of a dark stain on a bit of floor near the door, and his keen eyes told him that it was blood. Perhaps here was a clue to the mystery already! Blood on the floor of Mr. Garish Legare's room and a dagger sheath at the foot of his bed!

He might be the soul of honor, as Miss Lockwood had said, but this discovery was a very suspicious affair. Was it a clue?

Tracer searched the room with some care, but nothing was revealed. With the dagger sheath in his grasp he returned to the parlor, and stepping to the table on which the deadly blade was lying, the detective expert gazed alternately at the trophy he had secured and the beautiful dagger.

Was it the sheath of the blade that did the terrible deed?

As Tracer stood thus, pondering over the matter, the police sergeant in charge of the house gazed in from the doorway.

"Has this never-fail detective struck a clue?" his thoughts ran. "Looks like it. What Silas Tracer *can't* trace is not on the police records," he decided, and closing the door noiselessly, passed away to his duty on the front steps, satisfied that all was working in the right way, and that the mystery of that most mysterious assassination would surely be solved.

He had hardly gone without when the door was softly pushed open, and a second person entered—Miss Lyra Lockwood. Pausing a moment she then stepped forward and con-

fronted Silas. Her pallid face betrayed her new-born fear?

Did he hold that dagger's true sheath in his hand?

"You are a detective; I know it now!" she cried. "You are not going to enmesh Mr. Legare, are you?" in agitation, she could not repress or disguise.

"Certainly not, if he is innocent," was the calm reply. "But, did you ever see anything like this, miss?"

The dagger sheath was lying in the ferret's hand and the girl was staring at it, white-faced and breathless.

"Garish has quite a little cabinet of such things in his room. I forgot to tell you about it. But, where did you find that sheath?"

"What if in his room, miss?"

She recoiled with a shudder, and looked at the empty sheath as her inmost conscience told her that it did belong to the blade which had killed the unknown.

"Good-day! We may meet again, miss," said the ferret before she could recover, and then, as if suddenly thinking of his partner in the little den near Broadway, he walked from the room and nodded pleasantly to the watchful sergeant on duty at the door.

Silas went direct down-town, and at length ran up the steps which led to his nest, and ushered himself into the presence of Phineas Tripp and Bobbles.

"Tripp, the silent and reflective, said nothing; but Bobbles cried:

"What did you pick up, Silas?"

The detective looked at his friend and laid the dagger-sheath on the table.

Tripp picked it up, looked at it a moment, and smiled:

"Spanish; sixteenth century. You found it in the house, eh? I guess we'll hang somebody with this," and then he became as silent as the Sphinx.

"Jericho!" cried Bobbles. "I'm glad I ain't that somebody."

CHAPTER II.

PHINEAS TAKES A HAND.

SILAS TRACER seldom forgot anything, but that which he failed to think of was sure to be thought of by Phineas Tripp.

It was so after Tracer had come back from the scene of the murder, and after he had made his report to his partner.

"We will find out a little more about this young Mr. Legare. I have seen him, though. You will remember he came to the office once during the time we were working up that little matter for his father. I don't believe he killed the unknown man."

"But the dagger in the dead man's bosom fitted the sheath found in the young man's room."

"Yes."

"And there were blood-stains on the floor, as well as on the steps leading to the young man's chamber."

"That's all right," and Tripp seemed to dismiss this part of the proof. "Where did you say Royal Legare has gone?"

"He is now on the water, his destination Havana. I came back by way of the dock, and discovered that the Crusader sailed day before yesterday."

"With Legare on board, of course?"

"The books at the office showed that he had taken passage."

Tripp looked at the fire and seemed to knit his brows.

"What about the identity of the dead man?" Tracer ventured.

"Ah, we will get at that. I guess I'll go out."

Silas Tracer stared at his companion and let him have his way.

"He's quit thinking and is going to work," he muttered. "That is something new for Phineas. He sits here and solves puzzles which bother me, but this one starts him out. It's funny, though," and Tracer settled back in his chair, the only occupant of the den now, for Bobbles had gone back to his den elsewhere.

Phineas posted the letter he had written that morning and crossed the city.

In a narrow street which was half-blocked with drifts, dirty and grim, the little man, enveloped in an overcoat whose collar reached to the very tip of his ears, ran against a door and pulled a bell as if he would jerk it out.

The moment the portal was opened Phineas sidled into the house and turned upon a woman who looked at him and smiled at his grotesque appearance.

"You don't come very often of late," she said, leading the way to a room still further back, where she pushed a chair toward the detective while she poked up a sleepy fire.

"No not very often, Edith," answered Tripp, crossing his legs and seeming to see strange things in the coals.

"When are you going to give up hunting people? That's what I'd like to know."

"When I get tired, perhaps."

"You've been telling me that these ten years. It takes a good deal to tire you."

"A good deal, Edith," and Phineas showed his yellow teeth in a grin.

The woman, who was past forty, with a yellowish skin and a clear blue eye, laid one of her hands on Tripp's shoulder.

The little ferret looked up.

"What is it, Edith?" he asked.

"You're never going to quit, that's it," she went on. "You won't quit till some one runs a knife into you and lays you out forever. I know you, Phineas Tripp."

"You're a prophetess of nice things, aren't you?" and the man-hunter grinned again. "Do you know that somebody served an old man that way just last night?"

"No I don't, but I suppose that is a deed of nightly occurrence in this city."

"It may be, but last night's case is a puzzler."

"A puzzler to you, Phineas? Why, I thought that head of yours could solve any puzzler?"

The detective remained silent a full minute, during which time he was watched curiously by the woman.

"Look here, Edith, I want to ask you a question or two?"

"All right," and placing her arms akimbo, her sallow hands resting on her hips she waited for him to go on.

"When you were in limbo, Edith, did you see very much of that Spaniard who could throw a dagger into a cap-box lid across the corridor?"

The woman laughed.

"That's a funny question, now, isn't it?" she exclaimed. "You go back to a certain time which I don't care about recalling at all. You know it isn't a pleasant thing to have one tell you that you have seen the back of prison doors, and if some other man would ask me the question you have, I'd throw him through the window yonder."

Her hands dropped upon Tripp's shoulder. She was strong enough to carry out her threats, for he would be but a babe in her terrible clutch.

"I'll talk to you, Phineas, as I would talk to no other man living, for I know what you have done for me. Let me see: Did I see much of the Spaniard who could throw his daggers with such precision? Was that the question?"

The detective nodded.

"I saw a good deal of him, for they used to march him past our part of the prison nearly every day for exercise, and the last time I saw him was the very day they let him out."

"What was his name, Edith?"

"Savalli; I will never forget that."

"And he was sent up—"

"For forgery, but I always thought that wasn't the right thing for him to be guilty of. We used to talk about him and say to one another—we women prisoners whenever we got together—that he could kill a man with his dagger in the highest style of the art, and that we wouldn't care to be in the house with him."

"You haven't seen Savalli since you came back eh?"

"I saw him three weeks ago."

Phineas didn't start, but only looked steadily at the woman.

"You haven't told me this before, Edith."

"Well, you haven't been in this house for a month."

"That is true—not for a month to-morrow. And you saw Savalli three weeks ago? On the street?"

"Yes, sir. He didn't know me, though. He was talking to a fine-looking man on

Broadway and I was so close to him before I discovered him that I nearly stepped into the gutter."

"Oh, he seems to have acquaintances, then?"

"That's what I thought the moment I spied him. He didn't look much like the old Savalli. His face is quite smooth now, and his clothes are finer than they were when they brought him to the prison."

"And the gentleman who was talking with Savalli?"

"Oh, I didn't know him."

"Certainly not. But, what was he like, Edith?"

"He was a tall, good-looking man of perhaps fifty. His face was full and florid and his beard was auburn—indeed, it fairly shone in the sunlight which happened to touch it the time I came upon the pair."

"Edith, did you ever see Royal Legare?"

"Not to my knowledge. I don't know the man."

"But you do know Savalli?"

"I think I ought to."

They both smiled, the woman at her own words and the little detective at a sudden thought.

A minute later Phineas Tripp was passing over the soot-covered snow-drifts in the narrow street.

All this time Tracer was waiting for his partner in their den. He had looked at the dagger sheath a dozen times and had reflected over his discovery and Lockwood's story.

After awhile the door opened and admitted Tripp.

The pigmy came in and took a chair.

Phineas Tripp never talked till he was ready and then according to his own whims.

"You are right, Tracer," he said at last. "There are blood-stains in young Legare's room."

This told Tracer that his partner had been to Number Nine.

"I found this," and something like a ball of paper passed from Phineas Tripp's hand and fell on the table.

Tracer opened it and held before his face an advertisement which had been clipped from a "Want" column in one of the newspapers of the day.

"That was in the left hand corner of the right waistcoat pocket of the man killed in Number Nine," continued Tripp as Tracer read the bit of paper. "He clipped it so as to verify things, you see. Now, when we find the paper from which it was clipped I think we will have reached his identity."

"Certainly; but why look for a needle in this sort of haystack? I think we might learn something by finding Garish Legare."

"But more by discovering the dead man's identity. He told Miss Lockwood, who, by the way is young Legare's sweetheart, that if the house suited him, he would bring his daughter and that they would occupy it till Legare's return from Cuba."

"The girl says that."

"Well, the daughter must be somewhere in the city. We must find her."

"First of all, Tripp?"

"First of all," conclusively. "You will go down to Q—street, first block from N—, and see if any new arrivals have come in lately."

"Oh, you mean to Nick's?"

"Yes. It gives us more fish than any other pond, you know. I didn't stop there this time. Where's the sheath?"

Tracer opened a drawer and handed the black sheath to his companion.

To his astonishment Tripp pulled the dagger itself from an inner pocket and fitted it in the sheath.

"I thought so," the little detective said, "Spanish, sixteenth century. They made such things then and in Barcelona. They're scarce and high. Used by none but the richest to-day in Spain, and many's the cabinet which would be glad to have this thing in it."

Phineas seemed to be talking to himself and Tracer looked on with a smile.

"The old chap is getting a move on him," he said to himself. "He may have heard that men say he thinks while I do all the outdoor work. I shouldn't wonder if Bobbles told him this while I was out this morning. What's that he's saying now?"

"Young man never bought a dagger like this," muttered Tripp, looking at the blade

which had a dark stain near the hilt, showing that it had been left in a wound. "What is the matter with Savalli? You're going down to Nick's, eh, Tracer?"

The last sentence was spoken aloud and Tracer, ashamed to think that he might have been caught listening to the musing of his singular partner, sprung up and grabbed his overcoat.

"See if any new birds have drifted in," answered Tripp. "They come to Nick's some-how-or-other, you know. We found the Barings there last summer."

Silas was at the door when his partner called a halt.

"And, by the way, drop in at Miss Popette's and see how she is coming on."

Tracer laughed.

"Do you want me to bring you one of her cigars?" he called, as he shut the door.

There was no reply and as the tall detective went down the stairs to the street, the short one buried his face in his stubby arms on the table.

"There were marks of red ink on the left hand of the dead man, and I'll bet my head that he came from Nick's dove-cote. But, Tracer will know if this is true."

Then Phineas roused and sat up; he looked at the dagger and handled it carefully.

"Savalli came from Barcelona, too," he muttered.

CHAPTER III.

THE IDENTITY OF THE DEAD.

THE place called "Nick's" by Phineas Tripp was a plain house on a quiet street.

It had a character distinctly its own and was known as a retired boarding house for people who wanted to keep secluded. Now and then the practiced detective had occasion to look beyond its doors and sometimes he found there a clue to a case which had been puzzling him.

The house was kept by a man named Nick Cloman, a queer sort of fellow who regarded strangers with eyes of suspicion and who was always on the lookout for detectives, as he maintained that it injured a house to have it searched every now and then.

On more than one occasion the firm of Tripp and Tracer had visited the place the two men sometimes called the Dove-cote. Tracer generally did the calling and what he failed to find there was pretty sure to turn up elsewhere.

On the present occasion Tracer, somewhat disguised, went down to the Dove cote and entered.

The office, or rather reception room, was on the second floor and the detective found himself confronted by a small man who wore glasses, the rims of which were unmistakably alloy.

This person was Nick himself. He had a fashion of looking at every person who penetrated to this room, and when he did not think that they were there for his own good, they generally got a broad hint to make themselves scarce.

Tracer came forward and took a chair before the fire which blazed in the grate.

He and Nick were the only people in the room at the time and the landlord looked at the ferret with a queer expression.

"What's your rates?" asked Tracer.

"That depends. If you stay awhile there is, of course, a reduction; but I guess you don't care to tarry."

"What do you know about that?"

The landlord came closer to Tracer and bent over him with his peculiar smile.

"I know you. I haven't seen you for some time, but you'll have to do better than that, Tracer."

"That's all right. I didn't expect to deceive a man of your perceptive powers," returned the ferret. "Of course you know me; but, Nick, one has to play a game to deceive others, you know."

In another moment Nick Cloman fell back and went to the door, which he opened, looking down the stairs for a minute, when he came back to the detective.

"Are you trying to find her?" he went on, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"Trying to find who, Nick?"

"Why, the girl what's been with me. You know, Silas Tracer."

"I am looking for a young lady, Nick. She's here, then?"

Cloman took a paper from the counter

where the register lay and handed it to the ferret.

"The moment I clapped eyes upon the murder I knew who he was," he continued. "He went away yesterday and I heard him tell the girl that if he found the house all right, he would come back for her in the morning. Well, he found it too right for him, eh?"

Cloman's finger designated the account of the mysterious murder in Number Nine and the detective, glancing at it a moment, turned to the landlord of the Dove-cote and smiled.

"You guessed the identity of the dead man did you, Nick? And he has been your boarder?"

"Him and the girl."

"What is she like?"

"There's a good deal of the lady about her and she is as pretty a girl as you would find in a day's run. Besides, they came here two weeks ago and have been here ever since, going out but little and seeming to keep secluded. Of course I don't know anything about them, for I don't make it a point to look into my patrons' private affairs, and so I've let them have their whims, for the old man paid well. That's about all we keep hotel for, eh, Tracer?"

Tracer nodded and glanced toward the door which seemed to lead from the room to another part of the house.

"I haven't seen her this morning yet," added Nick, "but she must be in her room. From what I accidentally overheard last night, she doesn't expect him home till to-day, and therefore she knows nothing of the murder. I took care to keep the papers away from her and she is as ignorant of the whole bloody affair as a child unborn."

"What do they call themselves?" queried Tracer.

"The man is known here as Marcus Monk, though I would swear to that being his real name, and the girl is Miss Rana."

"You are sure it is not Rena?"

"Quite sure, for he told me himself and he put a stress on the first syllable which renders my recollection certain. Rana! That's it and no mistake. Do you want to see her?"

Nick was moving across the room when the door opened and a beautiful young girl appeared there, like a vision of light.

She stopped the moment her gaze fell upon the detective.

This must be Rana Monk.

In figure she was rather tall and sylph-like. Her eyes were dark and lustrous, being shaded by great black lashes, beneath which they lay like half-hidden pearls. Her dress was a close-fitting one of black, and the detective thought that she would not have to make any change in her apparel after he had broken the sad news of her father's death.

"I came in for the paper," she explained, looking at Cloman.

The newspaper was in the detective's hand, but instead of handing it to the landlord of the Dove-cote, he rose and stood before Rana Monk.

"You are Miss Monk, I believe?" he queried.

The fair girl looked at the landlord, and seemed to seek from him an explanation.

"This gentleman is interested in you and your father," replied Nick to the glance.

"In us? But I don't know him.—Yes, sir, I am Miss Monk. Miss Rana Monk."

Her last words were addressed to Tracer, and she seemed to come forward with curiosity as she spoke.

"I am glad I have discovered you."

She fell back and all color left her face. Her white hands shut, and for a moment she seemed on the eve of quitting the room.

"Then you have been hunting us. Are you—"

She stopped of her own accord and faced the detective as if sudden resolution had come to the rescue.

"You need not question me," she suddenly went on. "I will not betray papa. You can't get anything out of me. Good-morning!"

Rana Monk had turned to the door, and was about to vanish when the detective sprung across the room and intercepted her.

"One moment, Miss Monk. I have something to say to you, and if it is not of a

pleasant nature, you must not hold me responsible."

"Go on, then."

She faced him once more, her lips quivering and her eyes seeming to emit flashes of indignation.

"Your father may not come back very soon."

"Who told you this, and by what right do you come to me in this house and tell me these things?"

"I have seen him."

"You? Are you the person who advertised for a tenant?"

"I am not. Your father answered an advertisement, did he?"

"We have been looking quietly for another house," she looked at the landlord of the Dove-cote. "We have been wanting to get into another part of the city, not that we have not been treated well where we are at present, but a change for several reasons is desired. You have seen father, and yet you are not the man who wanted a tenant."

"Your father—"

Silas Tracer stopped, for he saw a sudden pallor cross the face before him, and he never was a very good hand to break sad news to the softer sex.

"Something terrible has happened!" broke in Rana Monk. "You are the bearer of bad tidings. You know what has happened? Did they find him last night in the house which he visited?"

"Did who find him, miss?"

"You may not know, and we have kept that secret for years. Father had secret enemies and— But you need not keep back the terrible truth. I am a bundle of nerves, and I can control them all when it becomes necessary."

He believed that now, for she was as calm as a Spartan, and stood before him, beseeching him to go on and tell her all.

"Your father will not come back to you as he went away," was Tracer's reply to her demand.

"Then he is dead."

"He is dead!"

Rana Monk threw a glance toward the landlord of the Dove-cote and put out a hand.

"Bring me a glass of water, Mr. Cloman. I shall recover in a moment. I want to hear it all, for the time for me work has arrived."

She swallowed the water and handed back the glass.

What a wonderful creature she is!

"He was murdered. You need not tell me how. The account of it must be in the paper which you hold in your hand and I forgive the landlord for not sending it up to our room as usual. They found him, as he feared they would. He was killed with a dagger, wasn't he? You see I am prepared for this thing. I am Marcus Monk's child and I will live to show the murderers that I am more than a woman!"

"The murderers, miss? You intimate that there must have been more than one hand in this affair."

"There was more than one hand in it," was the reply. "Will you let me see the paper now, or will you tell me all?"

"If you will let me tell it in private, you shall hear all I have to say."

Rana Monk led the ferret to her little chamber on the second floor. It was a small, neat place fronting the street, and everywhere were evidences of a woman's hand.

She was still calm, but there was no telling how long her nerve would hold out.

As she motioned the detective to a chair, she took one herself and fell to watching him.

"I will not tell you anything about our past only to say that papa was a marked man. We knew this. He said so every day. When we reached New York, that was three weeks ago, he was in the shadow and I feared when he went out last night to answer the advertisement that the shadow was at his heels. And so they found him. The dagger reached him at last and I am an orphan."

She looked at the carpet at her feet and Silas Tracer saw her hands tighten until she seemed to be sinking the nails into the white palms.

"You have lived here in seclusion ever since your coming to the city, I suppose?" ventured Tracer.

"Yes, sir. Father found this house the

day we arrived and here we have lived since. But, we wanted a change. He feared that he would be discovered, and when the paper with the advertisement reached us we thought the chance had come."

"Have you the paper, miss?"

"It is here. I saved it, I can't tell just why," answered the girl, taking a folded newspaper from the dressing stand and handing it to Tracer. "It came up to the room folded just as you see it, and the advertisement was the first thing papa saw."

"Did the landlord send the paper up?"

"I suppose so. At any rate it came from below."

Old Tracer leaned toward the window as he looked at the creases and then noted the place from which the notice had been cut by the dead man. Perhaps he thought of the bit of paper which Tripp had found in Marcus Monk's pocket.

"I think I need not conceal from you any longer the fact that I am a detective, Miss Monk."

She started, but toward him.

"I thought so from your questions," said she. "If you are that, then you will help me hunt down the murderers of my father? You will assist me in my work of vengeance, and in return I will tell you something which I shall keep from all others."

Things were going at last to Tracer's notion and he replied in confident tones.

"I shall leave no stone unturned to accomplish the ends of justice. I will have the assistance of my partner, a wonderful man, they say. Now, Miss Monk, if you are strong enough, I would like to have you tell me whatever you will about your father's enemies and about your coming to and stay in New York."

Beautiful Rana Monk leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes.

For a moment she lay thus, watched by the detective, and he wondered if there was a woman who had ever interested him before as this one was doing at that very moment.

She began to talk at last in clear but measured tones. She went back more than three years, though Tracer would have wished her to have gone back still further and she brought up the story of two lives to their coming to New York.

"You have not told me about your sojourn in France," said the detective when Rana paused.

"No, I have hinted at it, nothing more. But you can't get anything out of that. We have been followed—that is, father has. The hands by which he was marked years ago struck him down. It seemed fate that he should go to that old house to meet his doom. And what had become of its tenant? Oh, yes, I believe the advertisement stated that he was going South to spend two months. Isn't this a strange time of the year for one to visit the tropics, Mr. Tracer?"

"Time will tell Miss Monk; but you don't suspect that the house was vacated for the purposes of crime?"

"I do!" exclaimed Rana Monk. "I don't know anything about this Mr. Royal Legare; but the house was prepared for what took place in it. You will find this out long before you are at the end of the clue, Mr. Tracer. The net was prepared for the victim. This is as certain as the decrees of fate!"

CHAPTER IV.

RANA'S ADVENTURES.

THE sensation of the avenue was well told with embellishments in all the newspapers.

The body of the dead man, known now as Marcus Monk, was taken to the Dove-cote, where it was understood that his daughter resided, and two days later it was followed to the grave by the sorrowing, sad-faced Rana.

She was now alone in a city of strangers. As she went back to the Dove-cote, being heartlessly rattled over the stones, she leaned back in the rolling cab and buried her face in her hands.

For a long time she remained thus, looking up only when the vehicle turned into the street where the Dove-cote stood, and then to see the tall houses pass her like the scenes of a dream.

It was getting dusk and the long shadows of roof and eave were falling across the street.

She stepped from the cab and entered the hotel. Nick Cloman met her at the door, and the landlord's wife, a fussy but good-natured creature, helped her up-stairs where at her request she was left alone with her grief.

Rana found a note lying on the table and she picked it up and turned to the window.

Who could be writing to her at that time? Ah, perhaps it was some word from the detective whom she had already learned to trust.

Opening the letter which was incased in a small dingy envelope, she glanced at the hand-writing and then started.

"This is not from Mr. Tracer. I don't know anything about the name which is signed to the letter. I never saw it before. What does the writer want?"

And she read as follows:

"MISS RANA MONK:—

"You have friends near you in time of your need. Whenever you want to go away all you have to do is to say so and direct the letter to 'Confidence,' care Nick Cloman, and your wants will be attended to. Of course you will not care to remain in New York, now that you are homeless. The purse of the writer is at your disposal and his hand is ready to help you."

"CONFIDENCE."

Rana read the letter over and over, or until every word seemed photographed on her mind.

What did the landlord of the Dove-cote know of the writer? She has been asked to send her reply to "Confidence" in Nick Cloman's care, and this certainly told her that the landlord must know the man. Perhaps he had laid it on her table for the writer.

Rana folded the letter and slipped it in her bosom. When she rung for a cup of coffee, she waited, hoping that the tray might be brought up by Nick himself, as he sometimes did for favored guests; but when the door opened she saw before her the face of Mrs. Cloman.

Going on the theory that a wife generally gets hold of the husband's secrets, Rana invited Mrs. Cloman to be seated while she drank her coffee. The woman took a chair near the table and began to condole with the stricken girl.

"Your husband has a good many friends, hasn't he, Mrs. Cloman?" asked Rana.

"A great many. Nick's been making friends all his life and it would be a wonder if he hadn't a host of them, seeing that he's a bit past forty."

"I would think that he was a man of strong friendships."

"And every one of his friends will help you if you need help," was the reply.

"That's very clever, Mrs. Cloman, but you need not have made that statement as I was sure of it all the time. But your husband has one friend who is closer to him than all the others, now hasn't he?"

"Do you mean the dark-faced gentleman who sometimes comes in, but who hasn't been here since you came?"

"That must be the man."

"Well, I never knew much about him, only I know that he and Nick are friends and they like one another very much."

"And his name—I believe I heard your husband mention it a day or two after our arrival."

"Savalli," said Mrs. Cloman.

"That sounds like it. Savalli," said Rana as if trying to fix the name in her memory. "He must be a foreigner."

"He looks like a Spaniard, though I have never asked Nick about him, seeing that it wasn't very much of my business. He comes now and then to the hotel, as if he and my husband were acquaintances before we set up here."

"Would a letter addressed to Mr. Savalli in your husband's care reach him?"

"It certainly would; but do you intend to call on him for aid?"

"I cannot tell on whom I shall call, if on any person," answered Rana. "I was just seeing whither I could go in case I should need help. You understand my situation, Mrs. Cloman. Father died without leaving me much; but I have a little for present needs, and, then, I don't like to have to depend on the generosity of

strangers, though sometimes one cannot help it."

The landlord's wife thought this was very true and intimated that their bereaved guest would be expected to pay her board or hunt another place, no matter if she was alone in the world.

Rana Monk burned to get the letter which had come to her into Silas Tracer's hands, and when she saw the shadows lengthen into the darker ones of night she almost gave up hopes of doing so.

She was afraid to trust it to the mails, and the longer she thought of it, with what she had heard from Mrs. Cloman, the more she longed to bear it and the other news to the man on the trail.

But during her residence in New York she had been out so little that the city was a labyrinth of danger to her. She had walked once to the nearest corner from which she had looked down another street which seemed another world; and her ride to the cemetery had been under circumstances which gave her no clew to the puzzle of streets and alleys.

Before going away Silas Tracer had left his address with her in case she wanted to address him or summon him to the Dove-cote.

She took it out and looked at it.

For all she knew it might be miles away, the ride to her father's grave had been such a long one, and then it might be nearer than she thought.

The little card which Tracer had handed her shook in her eager hands and she read the address over again and again.

She dared not call Mrs. Cloman up and ask her how far it was to the detective's office.

The possession of the card must remain a secret, though she sometimes thought that Tracer was known to the landlord in his true light.

"I am sure I can find the place," said Rana to herself. "There are people who can direct me. They know where the detective is and I need not get lost if I keep my head."

To reach this point was to take another step and the next minute Rana Monk was putting on her hat.

She slipped on a dark shawl which she drew about her form and opened the door and listened. It was like escaping from a prison as she glided down the stairs and out into the street by a side door which the majority of the Dove-cote's guests never used.

For some time the lights dazzled the eyes of the dead man's child, but she got used to them and found herself on a certain corner uncertain which way to turn.

At that moment the portly figure of a policeman loomed up between her and the nearest lamp and Rana ran toward him.

"Will you please tell me how I can find the address on this card?" and a gloved hand held Silas Tracer's card up to the light.

The officer looked from the crumpled card down into the imploring face of the bewildered girl.

"It's a long way, miss, and you might get lost if you're not acquainted with the streets."

"But I can find it if you'll only direct me. I will remember the crooks and turns and get there in time."

"Do you know Tripp and Tracer?"

"They are friends of mine."

"Friends of yours? That's queer. I didn't know the human Sphinxes ever went that far."

The policeman laughed as he spoke and then proceeded to tell Rana how to find the detectives' den by the shortest cut.

Hastily thanking the officer, Rana started off again and made good her way for some distance. But turning a corner suddenly and being pushed momentarily to the wall by a rude fellow, she seemed to lose her bearings and there she was again—bewildered in a strange part of the city!

Undaunted, however, Rana started on again; but soon discovered that she was re-passing scenes which she had just seen.

She stopped with her heart in her throat from fear.

"I'll have to ask again," she said to herself.

While debating in her mind whom to ask for direction, she stepped into an open hall—

way to avoid a crowd of roysterers, drew the shawl more over her head and watched them pass.

As she emerged into the light once more she fell back with a sudden cry which she tried to suppress and hugged the shadows of the hallway once more.

Two men had just come in sight and at one of them Rana Monk was staring as if she had seen a ghost.

Possibly she had never seen this man before; possibly he now appeared to her like an evil genius for the first time, but he was there, walking close to a man with whom he was talking in low tones.

He was rather tall and with the agile figure of a runner. His darkish garments fitted his figure to a fault, and she saw the sallow skin, the twisted mustache of inky blackness, and the one womanish hand which he carried out of his pocket.

Who was this man that the suddenly orphaned girl eyed with such wolfish curiosity? His movements, snake-like and suggestive, held her in breathless awe.

His companion was a little taller, well-dressed and wore a full beard. But his face was not so plainly seen as that of the sallow man's. He seemed to keep in the shadows while he listened to the glib tongue of his companion and thus watched by Rana, they passed out of sight and she returned to her mission.

"The face is like the one in the old picture father used to carry in the bottom of his trunk. He took it out more than once and told me in low tones how it was the face of one of his enemies—the man who handled the keen dagger. My God! have I looked this night into the eyes of the secret slayer—the man who came upon him in the old house the other night and sent him back to me, murdered?"

Rana Monk regained the right way by questioning a man who even went with her half a square to set her right.

When she reached the number where she expected to find Silas Tracer she paused and looked back.

What if she had been followed to the spot? What if some enemy had tracked her to the detectives' den?

Darting into the lower hallway, Rana ran up the flight and rapped at the door which bore the figure "9" in white letters.

"Come in!" said the voice of some one inside.

Rana opened the door, but stopped on the threshold.

A curious-looking little man sat at a table. It was not Silas Tracer.

"You are in the right room, miss," this individual said, noting her hesitation.

"But I thought, sir, that I would see Mr. Silas Tracer, and I do not—"

"It's all one! You are Miss Rana Monk?"

He knew her, and yet she had not spoken her name.

"I am Phineas Tripp, and I thought you would be coming to us by and by, as Silas told me that he left his address with you."

The girl, reassured, shut the door and went forward. She took a chair and looked at Phineas Tripp.

"You've had a scare, eh, girl?" said the detective.

"You are right," answered Rana with a smile. "I have had a real good fright."

"It was on the street, too, and in a hallway."

"Why, who told you?"

"I see that you have paint on the side of your dress, such as they use to paint hallways."

"It was from a hallway that I saw them. They gave me a right good scare; but—"

"Will you look at this while I finish an entry?"

He pushed the latest edition of the afternoon newspaper toward her, and Rana saw that his hand rested a moment at the top of a certain column.

"You will perceive that the Crusader has been lost at sea. She sailed for Havana a few days ago, and is supposed to have carried as one of her passengers Mr. Royal Legare, the owner of the house in which your father met his death."

Phineas Tripp went back to the entry in his journal, and Rana fell to reading the dispatch which gave the fate of the Crusader.

"Now, if you will tell me about your scare, I will be obliged to you," said Tripp, looking up.

Rana did so.

She told him how she had come suddenly face to face with the two men on the sidewalk; and how the looks of one had sent a chill through her blood as they made her recall the photograph in her father's trunk.

Phineas Tripp was a good listener. He never interrupted her once, and when the door opened at the end of Rana's story to admit Silas Tracer, the little ferret—the "thinker" of the famous firm—looked up and dropped one of his hands upon the table.

"The Crusader has foundered at sea," said he, with a grin. "It was a deucedly narrow escape for Royal Legare."

Tracer said nothing. He never asked how Tripp reasoned out some mysteries.

"Legare, though booked for Cuba, never sailed in the Crusader. This young lady has just given me this bit of information."

Rana Monk's look suddenly became a stare.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF GUILT.

WHILE these events were occurring in the detectives' den, in another part of the city a scene of a different nature was taking place.

The reader will recall the visit to Royal Legare's house of Silas Tracer after the murder of the man, now identified as Marcus Monk, the father of Rana.

He will recall the ferret's visit to the room occupied by Legare's adopted son Garish, and the finding there of blood-stains and the empty dagger sheath.

The evident desire of the maid, Miss Lockwood, to screen the young man and to cover up his shortcomings, had told the detective that she thought a great deal of him despite his weaknesses. The blood-stains on the stairs, as well as on the carpet in his room, went against the young man, and the fact that he was not to be found did not help matters.

Already other detectives were weighing these things against him and the house was watched by those who were eager to lay hands on Garish Legare.

His absence militated against him, and already several papers had cleared the way for his arrest and subsequent conviction.

Lyra Lockwood was in a state of constant perturbation over the matter. She was afraid that Garish would fall into the hands of the police and all the time she dreaded to pick up a paper for fear of reading of his apprehension.

Miss Lockwood was in the act of going up-stairs the evening of Rana Monk's visit to the detectives' office, when she was startled by a noise at the rear of the hall and turning in that direction she found herself suddenly confronted by a man.

The light was not quite strong enough to let her have a full view of the person's face, but when he came forward and pulled a false beard from his face she fell back with a cry and seized the banisters for support.

Garish Legare stood before her!

For a moment the girl was quite unnerved, and when she recovered she was standing before the young man and was trying to warn him to be very discreet, as the house was watched and the police were eager to take him into custody.

"I couldn't keep away any longer," said Garish, leaning against the wall, when, the light falling full upon his face, Lyra saw that it was white and had a hunted look. "I know they're after me, but I couldn't stay away."

"But you didn't do it, did you?" cried the girl, springing forward and clutching his arm.

"I—don't know what happened that night. My mind is all confused and—"

"But you didn't see him in the room where I found him dead? You weren't down there at all, were you, Garish?"

"My God! don't know what happened, I tell you, Lyra. My head was in a whirl. That infernal chloral, you see."

Lyra Lockwood sighed.

"I thought you had given it up, Garish."

"I thought so, too, but I remember going

back to it that night after I came in. I didn't think there was any one but you in the house until I went down."

"Heavens! you went down, then? Why, I didn't hear you at all."

"Perhaps not. I remember going down the stairs, eager to see who was in the room. I came in with such noiselessness that I don't think I disturbed you."

"I heard you come in," said the girl. "I heard you go up-stairs; but I never heard you come down."

"Was my bed tumbled?"

"It had not been slept in."

"They went up and saw it, did they?"

"The detectives? Yes. You know I couldn't help showing them through the house. And, then, I thought you were safe—and—and—"

She stopped and looked at him, for there was a wild stare in his eyes and he seemed to be glaring at the wall beyond her.

"I have read the newspapers, and that's why I've been hiding, for I can't say what took place that night. You don't know what a man, unnerved as I was by that infamous drug, is liable to do. They say the old man was killed with a dagger. Was—it—mine?"

How could she answer him?

"I don't know what kinds you have in the cabinet," she said evasively. "Indeed, I haven't seen them for a long time, and you have been adding to the collection, you know."

"I've bought three rare specimens within six months."

"Was one a long, slender thing with a black case?"

"There were two with black cases; but let us go up and see."

He walked to the stairs and climbed them with a show of nerve.

Lyra kept at his heels, looking at him with mingled fear and love, and she saw him enter his room without seeing the blood stains at the door.

"I don't believe he did it," she said to herself. "I will never believe it, no matter what they prove on him."

Garish Legare turned on the gas and went to a cupboard set ingeniously in the wall. Opening it with a key which he took from his pocket, he revealed a little cabinet, consisting of several shelves on which were arranged a number of foreign-looking daggers. "Here is where I have kept them. I am the only person who carries a key to the stock and I had the lock made after a notion of mine."

He reached up to the highest shelf and took down a few daggers with which he turned to the light.

"These are the last ones I purchased," he said, with a glance at the breathless girl. "I separated them from the rest. See! there are six. No—Heavens! there are but five here!"

"Only five?" gasped Lyra Lockwood.

"You can see for yourself."

"Maybe you didn't look very good on the shelf, or you may have placed the other one on another shelf after looking at it."

Garish Legare returned to the cabinet and searched it well while Lyra watched him.

"It is not here. It was a long-bladed dagger capable of reaching a man's heart; and the sheath, as I remember, was an old fashioned one, black, and strangely embossed by hand."

"Merciful God!" cried the girl.

"Ah, that was the sort that did the deed, was it?" he asked. "A long-bladed weapon! I recall what the newspapers said about it. It was here on this shelf last week, for I had them all down looking at them. Did they find anything in this room—the ferrets, I mean?"

The girl did not speak. She felt her limbs sinking beneath her and knew that her face was the hue of the dead.

"They found enough to hang me, didn't they, Lyra?" cried Garish Legare, sinking upon a chair and for a moment hiding his face in his hands. "These men see everything. Nothing escapes them. What did they find, woman?"

He was up again and his hand encircled her arm, the fingers seeming to sink to the very bone.

"You don't want to tell me? Well, I will find out. I will go and ask them."

"You? You sha'n't go a step! That would be suicide. That would suit the man-hunters. No, you sha'n't surrender yourself to a single one of them!"

"But you must tell me what they discovered or I shall go mad. I know they suspect me of some crime for I have been watched."

He looked about the room and then turned again to her.

"I can bear it all now. I am not under the influence of any drug, though my nerves are somewhat shattered. You say you showed the detectives to this room?"

"I did."

"And you left them here?"

"Yes, I couldn't do less, you know, Garish."

"I don't blame you, girl. You had the utmost confidence in me; but you didn't think of the drug and my wild, reckless career."

"I thought of nothing only your innocence. I thought that you had business out before daylight, and that you left the house without having occupied the couch."

"Yes, yes. But what did this man-hunter find in this room?"

"He discovered several things. In the first place, he found dark stains on the carpet and more on the floor at the door yonder."

"Is that all?"

"No, he discovered an empty dagger sheath at the foot of the bed."

Garish Legare winced and bit his lip.

"Did you tell him about the daggers in the cabinet?"

"I told him that you had a collection, but he didn't open it."

"Lyra, I am in the net!" cried Garish Legare, suddenly rising and facing the maid.

"I was mad that night. I came home, the loser of five hundred dollars and got more money. I was also under the influence of the devilish drug which has sapped my manhood and whose slave I am. I know you love me, girl; I know that I should be a man for your sake. But it is too late. I have stained my hands with blood."

"No, no! You are innocent, Garish," exclaimed Lyra Lockwood. "They have no proof against you. Some one must have stolen the dagger, if it really was yours."

"But I have the only key that fits the lock of the cabinet."

"The murder must have taken place *after* your going out that night."

"What proof of this have you?"

Alas, the poor girl had none. She had heard no noises in the house after his coming home, and she could not look at him and answer his question to his salvation.

"It is a good thing that father is on the high seas, and that he is not here to be told that the boy whom he has raised with high hopes took an old man's life in the night."

"Give the detectives a chance to find the real murderer," urged Lyra.

"What further proof do they want than the blood-stains on my floor and the dagger sheath at the foot of the bed? These show that I must have come back here after doing the deed."

"But what could have been your motive?"

"Money!"

"But your father left you a good bank account when he went away, didn't he?"

"I thought he had, but when I went down to draw on that account I discovered that it was not one fourth as large as it should have been. It was a beggarly pittance and I don't understand it at all. Perhaps he wanted to drive me to crime. No, I dare not hint that. I drew out the whole and went to the green cloth, determined to double it. Well, I lost every dollar and came home in hopes of finding more in my own room."

Lyra said nothing. She was watching him like a hawk while his lips quivered and his face grew white as he talked.

"Somehow or other, when I went back to the den I had more money than I thought. There were bills which looked strange to me; but at the time I never dreamed that they were blood-stained."

Lyra Lockwood uttered a cry and shrunk from him.

"You don't tell me that you don't know where you found the money you took from the house that night?" she gasped.

"I don't know where I found it unless—"

He stopped and hung his head.

"There's hardly any use fighting fate—especially a fate of this nature," he suddenly exclaimed. "Don't you see that the longer I talk the deeper I enmesh myself? What is the detective's name who searched this room?"

"Silas Tracer."

"*That* man?" cried Garish. "Then I am doomed, for he never lets up on any one! What did he say about the dagger and the blood-stains?"

"He never expressed an opinion about them."

"Certainly not, but he has one and it is against me! My God! if I had only remained in the house all that day; if I had only remained away from the Casino! But, some evil genius dragged me to the spot and I lost and lost until I came home for more money, finding some which I did not think was in the house. But wait! I will face the crime, girl. I will go to the detectives and tell that I am Garish Legare and that they needn't look further for the murderer."

He tried to reach the door as he spoke; but the hand of Lyra Lockwood pushed him back.

"That would settle the case against you. No confession of what I believe you never did. You didn't kill that man."

"How do you know, girl?"

"Because there never was murder in your heart, no matter to what straits you were reduced by gambling and the work of the drug. You shall not quit this house until you promise me not to say that you are the guilty one. Let the detectives hunt awhile. They say that Silas Tracer and his partner are famous for solving puzzles and mysteries in crime. Let them work awhile and meanwhile we will help them all we can in secret and perhaps openly."

He said nothing for a moment.

"But I can't remain here," he remarked at last.

"No. Where have you been hiding since the dread night of the 10th?"

"Oh, I can go back there. I will be safe in that spot, I think, for I have one friend who will not betray me. Now, Lyra, if you will let me out I will vanish."

"And will not come back here until I send for you?"

"I promise that, girl."

"Give me your address, then. It will be safe with me."

He scribbled something on a sheet of paper and with trembling hand gave it to her, then opened the door and sprang into the hall like a hunted beast.

Lyra let him out the back way and watched his figure till it had crossed the back yard and disappeared.

"I'll stake my life that he didn't do it—it matters not what the detectives may bring against him. Garish Legare never killed Marcus Monk. He is the victim of circumstances. I will stand by him through thick and thin. I will prove that he is innocent of that terrible crime."

And Miss Lyra Lockwood turned back while the victim of chloral and gaming slunk through the shadows of New York, destined ere long to see the coils of crime tighten about him and drag him with resistless force to doom.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FINGER POINTS TOWARD—SAVALLI?

No wonder Rana Monk started when she heard Phineas Tripp tell his partner that she had just informed him that Royal Legare did not sail in the Crusader.

So far as she knew she had done nothing of the kind. She had merely given him an account of the adventures which had befallen her while seeking their den, and of course they were not complete without an account of her encounter with the two men who were talking so confidently.

With the newspaper in her hand her eye wandered to the story of the fate of the Cuba-bound vessel.

It was evident that the ship had foundered at sea for all accounts verified this. A vessel which had just reached New York brought the news of the disaster, and all that had been found of the ill-fated Crusader was a box and a spar, the former marked with her name.

But the announcement that Royal Legare, the owner of the house of the midnight

crime, had *not* embarked on the Crusader, when he was a paid passenger, was news to Rana, and here Phineas Tripp was saying that she had given him this very information.

It was simply inexplicable and she did not care to question the little man who looked to her more like a Sphinx than a human being.

"How did you find the office, miss, and after dark, too?" asked Tracer. "It is a long distance from the Dove-cote to this street. Oh, you must have taken a carriage."

Rana explained that she had footed the whole distance, and then detailed to Tracer her adventures on the way.

"Now, you see how she came to tell me that Royal Legare did not sail in the Crusader?" explained Tripp, looking up at his partner.

Tracer nodded.

A sudden idea flashed through the girl's mind.

"Was one of those men Royal Legare?" she asked.

"Did you ever see him?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Did your father ever mention the name of Legare?"

"I never heard him."

"How about Savalli?"

"I don't think he ever mentioned it either, but Mrs. Cloman, my landlord's wife, tells me that Savalli is her husband's friend. Ah, I must not forget the note!"

She took from her bosom the letter which she found on her table when she came back from the funeral and laid it on the table before the ferret. The little hand of Tripp seized it.

Rana looked at him while he read it, after which he passed it over to Tracer, who gave it a like inspection.

"Answer it," suggested Tripp. "Write Savalli a letter thanking him for his kindness, and say that you may have to call on him for help in the near future."

"But I don't like to have to be dependent on any one, especially on a stranger."

"That's all right, miss," assured Tracer.

"You will only be carrying out *our* wishes in the matter and we will see that you are not dependent on Savalli or any one else, for that matter."

"I will write the letter when I go back."

"Send the lady home in a cab," said Phineas Tripp.

Seeing that the interview was at an end, and wondering why the detectives had not asked her any more questions concerning her father, Rana Monk went down stairs with Tracer, after bidding the silent Tripp good-night.

When the door had closed on the pair Tripp picked up the note and held it in the light. He studied it for some time, with his face as sphinx-like as ever, and when he laid it down there was nothing to show that it had told him anything.

Tracer had the cab which he had called stop within half a square of the Dove-cote, and he walked with Rana to the side entrance which she entered and crept to her little room without eliciting any comment so far as she knew.

She opened her little writing-box and answered the letter signed "Confidence."

She wondered if the detectives were right in ascribing the authorship of that letter to Savalli. Perhaps they had made a mistake; still, she had resolved to trust them in everything, for were they not trying to bring to swift justice the hand which had struck her father down in the house on the avenue?

Rana resolved to hand her letter to Nick in the morning, and placing it underneath her pillow, she retired and fell asleep thinking of the adventures of the night.

Meantime Phineas Tripp had vacated the little room where he and his partner wrestled with the intricate problems of crime. He went down-stairs to a restaurant in the neighborhood. It was a favorite resort of his at unseasonable hours and he had a certain corner where he ate, sometimes alone and now and then with Tracer.

Phineas gave his order, which need not have been given at all, for the waiter knew what he took at such an hour, and then fell back in deep thought.

Across the aisle sat a woman whose face was turned from the little ferret and who

was sipping a cup of strong coffee, while every now and then she glanced up and seemed to study the silent detective.

All at once she turned toward him and leaned half way across the aisle.

"Good-night, Phineas!" she saluted

The face of the pigmy relaxed for a moment and he looked into the face before him now.

"All right," he answered her.

"You didn't know me, eh?"

"Yes, I did, Poppette. I saw who it was the moment I came in, but I was busy."

"Thinking, I suppose. Trying to get to the bottom of the new puzzle."

"Perhaps."

"It bothers you some, now doesn't it, Phineas?"

Just here the waiter appeared, and the detective turned to his repast for a second as he arranged his napkin at his throat.

"Would you mind coming over to the house after you have finished your supper?" asked the woman, who was perhaps thirty, with a rather good-looking face, in which were set two small black eyes.

"If you have any news I might drop in a moment."

"You shall decide about its being news," was the reply. "I dropped in here, hoping to see you. I didn't care about going to the den, you see."

"I'll come, Poppette."

The woman rose and left the place, leaving the detective to his meal, which he ate with zest. When he had finished he paid his score and sauntered out, having first picked up a cigar which, before leaving, Poppette had placed at the edge of his table.

Three squares from the restaurant Phineas entered a hallway and ran up a flight of steps.

The door at which he knocked was opened by this same woman, and he entered her room.

"I thought you would come," she remarked with a smile. "I don't know whether you care to hear the news I have picked up, but knowing that you and Tracer are looking into the singular murder on the avenue, I thought I might have a little clue for you."

Phineas had dropped into a chair. He now regarded the speaker intently, but did not speak.

"Do you want to find Garish Legare, the old man's son?" asked Poppette.

"I haven't been looking for him yet."

Poppette's countenance fell.

"But you certainly know what they are saying about him?"

"Yes."

"You know that some papers almost openly accuse him of the murder?"

"We know that."

"The dagger sheath was found in his room, and the reporters also say there was blood on the floor. Then he came back to the Casino that night after he had left it for home, all excitement and with lots of money in his pockets."

"Was that in any of the papers?"

"No, but I heard it."

"You heard it, eh?" and Phineas showed a little eagerness contrary to his nature. "Were you there, Poppette?"

"To be sure I wasn't. But I had two customers in the store to-night, and I overheard them discussing the crime."

"Did they talk for your edification?"

"Not for me, of course, but I happen to have sharp ears and I heard a few words."

"And they unwittingly told you that Garish Legare came back to the Casino with a good deal of money the night of the murder?"

"Yes; I heard that from these men."

"Are they regular customers of yours?"

"No, but one of them has dropped in several times of late."

"Who is he?"

"That I cannot say for sure, unless the card which one of them dropped to-night gives him away."

Tripp put out his hand, saying nothing.

Poppette opened a drawer in the little table in the middle of the room and handed him a card.

"This is what you found on the floor of your shop after the men were gone?"

"Yes."

Phineas Tripp had already read the name on the card and he seemed to be looking at the edges which showed that it had been carried in somebody's pocket.

There was nothing on the card but the name, which was:

"V. SAVALLI."

"Do you know which of the men dropped the card, Poppette?" asked Phineas.

"I do not. The slender man bought the cigars and paid for them. He took a spectacle case from his vest pocket and in doing so may have pulled the card out."

This was highly probable, but the detective said nothing.

"They did not talk about the crime until after they had entered your store, did they?" he queried. "That is, they were not talking about it when they came in?"

"They didn't seem to be. They fell to talking about it when they had the cigars and were lighting them."

"Then you heard the remark about Garish Legare coming back to the Casino with a good deal of money?"

"Yes, sir."

Phineas Tripp seemed to sink within himself. He laid the card on the table and took a cigar from the open box which Poppette had placed at his disposal.

They had been friends for some time. Poppette kept a little cigar store on a street which lost itself in Broadway and she had been so well patronized by Phineas Tripp that a friendship had sprung up between the pair and the waning years had deepened their acquaintance.

"The young man can't escape the police much longer, I suppose," remarked Poppette, breaking in upon Tripp's thought.

No answer.

"I should think that they have enough against him already," she continued.

Silence as before.

The woman smiled as she leaned forward and looked at the sallow face partially revealed through the smoke.

"I see that Royal Legare, the young man's father, sailed in the Crusader which has been lost at sea; so a whole family is about to be blotted out at one fell swoop."

Phineas now looked up and caught Poppette's eye.

"What's that?"

"You've been sleeping, Phineas!" declared the woman, with a laugh. "I have been talking for three minutes and here you weren't paying the least attention. It's a nice way to serve an old friend!"

The little man moved and stretched one arm across the table.

"I was trying to untie a knot," he explained.

"But you were asleep. Come, sir, confess it and take another cigar. Yours is out now."

But Phineas arose and picked up the card bearing Savalli's name.

"Take it," urged the woman.

"Thanks. You've done me a service to-night. I am quite sure those customers won't give you any more information. I'll take another cheroot if you please, Poppette;" and, selecting another one, the little detective bade the woman good-night and went out.

"It's the third time to-night," he said to himself. "The trail began at the Dove-cote, then Rana saw him on the street and Poppette meets him in her shop. The trail seems to lead to Savalli. I must take a look at him and try and pick up something about young Garish Legare's whereabouts. Tracer can take the other trail for a little while; but I won't trust any one with my part, but myself."

On his way back to his office Phineas Tripp stopped and bought the latest edition of an evening paper though at that moment its news was a trifle stale.

As he turned from the news-stand some one brushed him.

He gave this person a look and sauntered after him.

They met at a certain corner and Phineas Tripp was greeted with these words:

"I have found where Garish Legare is, but the young man won't be there long unless he moves again. They are about to close in on him."

The speaker was Silas Tracer.

"Don't let them do that, Silas. Poppette is worth her weight in gold," and with this, which drew a grin from Tracer, Phineas folded his newspaper and walked away.

"Bless me, if I don't believe the old girl's cheroots have captured him at last!" smiled the Sphinx's partner.

CHAPTER VII.

RUN DOWN.

MR. SILAS TRACER had discovered one thing and that was that Garish Legare was about to be seized by the police.

More than this, he had ferreted out the young man's hiding-place; but thought before he did anything he would communicate with Phineas Tripp.

"Don't let them get hold of him," was Tripp's response and this had sent Silas off again.

No, he would not let the police get their hands on Garish Legare, if he could help it, and he had a way of doing a good many things which puzzled the astute police of Gotham.

Leaving Tripp on the street, and on his way home from Poppette's, Silas turned back.

He threaded his way across the city and plunging suddenly down a narrow street, brought up against a door, at which he knocked.

It was opened in a cautious manner and he caught sight of a woman's face beyond the threshold.

Silas Tracer slipped into the hall, watched by the woman, who was not very young, and whose eyes regarded him with a stare of indignation.

"I want to see the young man here," Silas announced.

"What young man?" asked the woman as she moved toward a door as if to keep the detective out of a certain room.

"Here I am!" said a voice at this moment and the door opening revealed the figure of Garish Legare in the middle of the room.

He had just come back from his visit to Lyra Lockwood in the house of the tragedy.

"What did you do that for?" cried the woman, looking at Garish. "I thought you wanted to remain out of sight. Well, it's your lookout, not mine."

She left the room and the two men stood face to face for a minute.

"You are looking for me, eh?" said young Legare. "Well, I'm sick of this hiding. I am tired and ready to face my fate in whatever form it appears."

"You are Garish Legare?"

"That's the name I go by, but perhaps if you had not found me, I would have taken another name. I don't know, however."

The detective eyed Legare for a little while and then approached him.

"They are closing in on you," he said.

"And you are one of the hounds?"

"I don't belong to the police. I am a detective—"

"It's all the same. What does it matter by whom I am caught? The doom will be the same."

"I don't know about that," answered Silas. "A good deal depends on yourself. You don't have to walk into the trap."

"I am in it, already."

"But there may be a way out."

"I can't see any."

"You don't care about trusting me, I see."

"I haven't said that I would not."

"You seem to take it for granted that I am playing the role of beagle as against your interests. Just because I have announced myself as a detective, you believe that I am here to drag you into court for the murder of Marcus Monk."

Young Legare remained silent as he regarded Silas Tracer, as if he were trying to fathom the real meaning of his nocturnal call.

"Have you been here ever since you awoke to the realization of your peril?"

"Yes. I thought of Aria the first thing, though I haven't been here exactly all the time. I have been home."

"Back to Number Nine?"

"Yes. I have just come from there."

"That was quite risky."

"I know, but I could not keep from the place. I went back after information."

"And you got some?"

"It was a terrible blow square in the face."

"Miss Lockwood told you, didn't she?"

"Yes, Lyra. She told me about the finding of the dagger sheath in my room and I saw the blood-stains. I must have been crazed that night."

"Then you hardly know what took place?"

"I begin to recover now. That is, I have picked up a few things since I have gotten the drug out of my system. I have tried to think coolly, and have succeeded to a degree. But where did I get the money I took back to the Casino? That remains the darkest mystery of the whole affair."

"How much did you take back?"

"Something like six hundred dollars."

"More than you thought you had in your room?"

"Four times as much. I had saved a little, but nothing like that sum."

"Was it in large bills?"

"They could tell you that at the Casino."

"You lost it all, did you?"

"All but thirty dollars."

"Why didn't you go back home?"

"I heard of the crime on the street, and a sudden fear took possession of me. I could not shake it off, and the wonder is I wasn't arrested before I came here. Aria wouldn't let me out of the house till to-night, and then I promised not to be gone long. Are you the detective who went to my room and found the dagger sheath and the blood-stains?"

"Miss Lockwood showed me the way, gave me the key to your room, and I looked through it."

"Where was the sheath lying?"

"At the foot of the bed."

"And the blade itself?"

"It was lying on the table before the murdered man when I got to the house; but Officer Grabben pulled it out of the wound and laid it there."

"Yes, yes. The newspapers told me something like that. Was my cabinet locked?"

"It was, so far as I could see."

"I found it locked to-night, for I opened it in Lyra's presence to look for the daggers."

"Where do you pick up the daggers you collect?"

"In various places. I have a fad for collecting such devilish things, and as I have preferred daggers of Moorish and Spanish make, I generally pick them up among the Spanish residents. They bring them over, old heir-looms, you see, and there is where I find most of mine."

"Did you pick up the sixteenth century dagger—the one which seemingly committed the crime—in that part of the city?"

"Yes, I bought it of old Cortelono."

"The little old man who has a notion shop near the corner?"

"Yes."

"Did you mark it in any way?"

"I put a private mark on all my curiosities. The top of the dagger-hilt I stamp with a very small "G"—like the "m" which you find on our silver dollars."

"And you stamped the Cortelono dagger, did you?"

"Yes, the day I got it. I recall that distinctly, because I broke the stamp, slightly injuring the "G."

"Did you discover the old man in the house that night?"

"There you have me," and Garish Legare smiled grimly. "As I told Lyra, I don't know what I saw there. I may have seen him in the room; I may have stolen upon him like a thief in the night, for I wanted more money to beat the tiger with, and just then I guess I wasn't very particular as to how I obtained it."

"You don't have to make use of such language here," said Tracer. "Is it possible that everything is a blank to you from the moment you entered the house till the time you left it?"

"Things have been cleared up a little."

"In what way?"

"I can recall the fact that I washed my hands in my room that night."

"Lyra said nothing about that to me."

"I suppose not. That girl don't want to see me get into trouble."

"Now, about the lock to your cabinet?"

"I had it made to order. It was a little invention of my own, and I superintended its construction."

"And you carried the only key to it?"

"Yes."

"Who made the lock?"

"A locksmith in the lower part of the city—a man whom I struck accidentally one day and who revealed his business while we sat sunning ourselves on the Battery."

"Do you know his address?"

"I don't know it now. He has moved since he made the lock and key. I wouldn't know where to find him now."

"But you know his name?"

"Unfortunately I never took the pains to ask him. I knew his address and that was all I cared about."

"Well, let me have it, then."

Garish complied and Tracer made a note of the place.

"I have read that the Crusader had been lost at sea," suddenly broke forth the young man. "If father really took passage in her, I fear he is among the unfortunate."

"If he really took passage? What do you mean, Legare?"

"I hardly know."

"You are aware that he advertised for a tenant during his absence?"

"I was only made aware of it by the advertisement which I ran across in the newspaper. He never told me anything about his intentions."

Silas was silent for a half minute. He seemed to be debating the trend of his future questioning.

"What took your father to Cuba, Legare?"

"I cannot say."

"Had he interests there?"

"He used to have a share in a plantation, but that I believe was disposed of some years ago. I never knew he was going till the very day of his departure. Then he called me into the library and told me of his trip."

"After he had engaged passage in the Crusader?"

"It was after that, of course. I did not help him pack up. He did not leave me as much money as I thought he would, and that, I suppose, is the cause of all my trouble."

"Do you know what your father was worth?"

"Indeed, I cannot say, but, from the fact that he left me such a small sum to use during his absence, I fear he was not as well fixed as the world believes."

"He never stinted you before?"

"Of late I have not been receiving the allowances I used to receive. I blamed a certain man with this; but perhaps I should not have done so."

"A certain man? Not your father, then?"

"No, sir, a Spanish-looking man who came to the house now and then."

"Ah! What was his name?"

"I came in contact with him but once, and then father introduced him to me as Senor Savalli."

"But you never became very well acquainted with the senor?"

"No, sir. I didn't care to. I soon discovered that he had a certain influence over father and I cut him direct."

"Did it offend him?"

"I cannot say. He is as mysterious in some respects as a Sphinx. Father told him at the time of the introduction that my fad was dagger collecting and Senor Savalli began to talk about such things in a manner which told me that he could give me a good many pointers. I believe he is not in the city just now."

"What makes you think he is not, Legare?"

"On the day before the murder I found in the library a letter which father must have dropped. As it was open, with some curiosity I looked at it to see that it was from Savalli. It had just come up from New Orleans—had seemingly arrived but that day. He wrote that he was to sail for Cuba the following day and that, after a day or two there, he would embark for Spain."

"You remember this distinctly do you, Legare?"

"Quite distinctly, sir."

Ten minutes later the door of Aria's house opened to let Silas Tracer out.

Young Legare had promised to hunt another hiding-place forthwith. He was to leave the house by another exit and vanish once more.

As the detective turned into the street he caught sight of a man standing across the thoroughfare in a half-darkened hallway. This man was directly opposite the mouth of the street whereon Silas Tracer had discovered Garish Legare.

When he moved off the man came from the hall-way and crossed the street. Tracer saw him.

The moment he turned into Legare's street the detective turned back and retraced his steps.

He glided along through the shadows and watched the figure of the supposed spy.

His keen eyes saw him stop and listen at the door which hid young Legare from the public. Presently the gliding figure came back to the light and moved away.

This time he had Silas Tracer at his heels.

He led the ferret a long chase; but was run down at last.

He entered a house in a better part of the city and as the door closed on him Silas Tracer laughed.

"Well, brother Savalli, I think I know where you nest," he said aloud as he turned away, and soon afterward he entered the little den near Broadway to find it untenanted.

Neither Tripp nor Bobbles greeted him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LINK PHINEAS FOUND.

PHINEAS TRIPP, if questioned, could have told why he was not in "the office" to greet his partner when he returned from interviewing and warning Garish Legare.

The pigmy was in another part of the city on what he called "my trail," and we will seek him out and see what success rewarded his keenness.

Phineas was willing that Tracer should warn the young man so as to keep him out of the hands of the police, while he undertook a matter which was pretty sure to be attended with some danger.

The Monk Mystery, as the murder at Number Nine had already been dubbed by the reporters, threatened to become one of almost absolute impenetrability; and the best ferrets in the city had given it as their opinion, in private, that the hand which struck Monk down, if not that of young Garish Legare, would never be unearthed.

Phineas carried in his little head the particulars of the loss of the Crusader as they had been told in the afternoon papers.

He turned up in a quiet street where he knocked at a door, to be admitted by a man who stared twice before he addressed him.

The detective walked in and turned on this person.

"Captain Warlow, I believe?"

"Yes, and I am trying to get a little rest," responded that person, in no enviable frame of mind.

"You do look a little bothered, captain."

"I am bothered. A thousand-and-one people, more or less, have called since we received news of the loss of the Crusader. I have told them that I have no more news than the papers have given them. You see, I am in charge of the office on the pier, and the Crusader's friends expect me to have dominion over the waves as well as over the office."

Captain Warlow crossed his legs as he settled back in an easy-chair and looked at Tripp.

"I won't detain you long, captain. You have the books pat. You always do, they say. Was Royal Legare one of the Crusader's passengers?"

"He was, sir. Ah, I have seen the accounts of the mysterious tragedy at his house. Well, he is past all worry about it. Yes, sir; he had a state-room. I engaged it for him in person, even went with him on board and saw that it was all O. K. I believe he said he was going to Cuba, on business, and did not expect to return for two months. A friend of yours, eh?"

"Yes," answered the cunning "piper." "I have been living on faint hope that, after all, he may have reconsidered his plans at the last moment and did not go."

"I am quite sure he did not do so, unfortunately for him," declared Warlow. "Just before the vessel sailed Captain Nason came in and I asked him if all his passengers were aboard and he answered that all were accounted for. So, you see, you will have to dismiss the faint hope you have carried in your bosom."

"Do you think any escaped?"

"I take things as they come and look them squarely in the face. The captain who had brought the news to us tells me that they cruised about the place where they found the box and spar without picking up a living soul."

"All gone down."

"Every one, I am sure. Your friend Legare among the rest."

"That's bad."

Phineas seemed to smile to himself when he emerged from Captain Warlow's residence.

"Queer?" muttered he. "Well, not so queer after all. Men can be deceived as well as women. I'll try the other pull."

He buttoned his coat and chewed nimbly at the stump of Poppette's cheroot.

He was not long reaching a part of the city inhabited largely by foreigners, and dodging into a darkened hallway where the odors of filth were almost overpowering, he began to climb a stairway which brought him to a closed door which he opened without ceremony.

He ushered himself into a room, quite narrow and littered with countless things.

A man who saw him come in got down from a greasy stool and came ambling down the counter.

There was an unmistakable Spanish cast of countenance to this personage and Tripp stopped with the counter between them.

"Well, Senor Cortelono," accosted the detective. "How is business to night?"

"Not very good, senor."

"You do a fair business for all it is dull at times." I wish I knew as much about daggers and such things as you. And if I knew as much and had the money, what a collector I would be!"

The old man grinned. This was the famous Cortelono, a man who did business in old daggers and other things which could be made to take human life; but he pretended to sell them to collectors only; but he never asked questions when a dollar was in the scales.

"Do you collect?" he asked.

"Sometimes, but one can't collect on a small income."

"I sell some good blades very cheap, senor."

"How cheap? You will have to give them away almost to get me to invest. But what have you in the way of old Moorish?"

The old man took down a box which he opened before the ferret.

It was filled with a collection of old daggers, some of which were very ancient as their hilts and strange looking blades told the caller.

The little detective priced a number and laid several to one side.

"You don't happen to have any sixteenth century Spanish work, eh, senor?"

"I have but two."

"Two more than I want from the way you generally sell things."

"I sell cheap."

"Let me see them."

The old man went to one end of his shop and brought forward another box which he unlocked.

Among the daggers which he spread out for the detective's inspection was one which Phineas picked up.

"That is almost like it. I know just what I want for I saw one somewhere. I want a dagger made in Barcelona, with a black hilt embossed by hand, as only the Barcelonans could do it. It has a Don's head on the hilt and a motto from the Koran beneath it."

"One of the daggers which Karan, the mussulman, taught the Barcelonans how to make," exclaimed Cortelono. "I had one—yes, two of those; but they are gone. They pick them up readily, you see—quite a demand for them."

"When did you sell them, senor?"

"One last summer and the other in the fall."

"Both to the same man?"

"No; what would the same fool want with two Karans?"

"That's a fact. I want one of those daggers. They sell high, though."

"Fifty apiece."

"Double my pile. Sometimes they come back to you, don't they?"

The old man shook his head.

"Karans never come back."

"Too rare, eh?"

Cortelono nodded.

"But sometimes," he persisted, "their owners get hard up and will sell if you only knew it. It has been the desire of my life to own a Karan. Nothing like it in the history of daggers, they tell me. Now, if you could remember to whom you sold the pair, I might try to keep an eye on them and—"

"A young man bought one. I sell him a good many blades, and the other was bought by a Spaniard."

"One of your own race, eh? Then, he knew just what he was getting, Cortelono?"

"Yes. He came from Barcelona."

"From where Karan worked?"

"Yes, and that is why, perhaps, he wanted the blade."

"You don't know him?"

"No."

"I used to know a Spaniard who collected daggers; but he has passed beyond my ken and I don't think he is in the country any longer."

"Was he a young man?"

"Not very; might have been fifty, perhaps not over forty-five. I am not a good judge of people's ages by their looks. If my friend bought the Karan and cared to sell at all, it would be to me, if I could find him."

"What was he like?"

Phineas Tripp described Savalli.

Before he was through with his description, he saw how interested the old dagger expert was, and by the time he was through, he would have bet his head that Savalli was the man.

"You have him, I guess, senor," averred old Cortelono.

"Thanks. When did he get the Karan?"

"In the fall."

"Then you sold the other one first?"

"To the young man, yes."

"And neither have come back?"

"No; and, what is more, senor, if you wait here for them to return, your head will be white and you will be bolder than I am."

Tripp went back to the box of daggers and bought an odd-looking one which commended itself to him on account of its excessive cheapness.

Then bidding the old fellow good-night, he walked out and struck the street with a smile.

"Two Karans sold—one to Garish Legare and the other to my friend Savalli. Always Savalli! Do all trails lead to him as all roads do to Rome?"

Phineas, pleased with his night's work, went toward home.

On the way he dropped in on Poppette; but she was not at home, having gone to a late theater, so said a note on the table.

Just an hour after his departure from Cortelono's, that individual's door swung open and the little old man fell back from the vision that confronted him.

A man entered, and stepped at once to the counter.

"Do you want to sell your Karan, senor?" asked Cortelono.

"Sell it? Do I want to part with my head?"

The old man grinned.

"I didn't know, you see. I can find a market for you, and I thought that if you cared to sell and get a raise—"

"Who wants to buy it?"

"A gentleman who was in here just an hour ago."

"In here?"

"Yes."

"Looking for daggers?"

"That's what he was doing."

"And you told him that you had sold me a Karan?"

Old Cortelono began to stammer, when a hand crossed the counter and clutched his shoulder.

"For the Virgin's sake, senor—"

"No whining! Didn't I tell you at the

time that a still tongue never got any one into trouble? What was this man like?"

"He was little—could barely see over the counter, and I do believe he stood on his toes while he talked with me."

"Oh, he wasn't a giant, then?"

"Not by any means."

"And he wanted to know—what?"

"He wants to buy a Karan."

"You're sure of that, are you?"

"That's what he said, and he went on to tell me that you were his friend."

"This little devil did? And you took it all in?"

"How did I know he lied, senor?"

"Every man lies nowadays!" blurted the man who held Cortelono. "And of course you told him that I had a Karan. I ought to jerk you out of your clothes."

The old man begged anew.

"Open your head again to anybody and the Karan you sold me comes home!"

And with this threat the man vanished before the dealer in knives realized that he was gone.

"A little man! Stood on his toes while he talked and wormed the secret out of old Cortelono!" muttered the irate man on the street. "The mystery-sleuth has taken the trail. I must see about this. You must match this man, Savalli!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF AN OUTCAST.

To the outside world the mystery deepened.

When the police went to arrest Garish Legare he was not to be found, and Aria, the woman who had sheltered him, knew nothing of his whereabouts, or at least she would not tell anything.

Baffled, the hounds of the trail turned to other scenes and began to look anew for the murderer of Marcus Monk.

Meantime neither Tripp nor Tracer gave them anything to go on and the two ferrets seemed to have lost the trail themselves and to be as much "at sea" as the best of them.

Phineas, the silent, was found in the den when Tracer came back from one of his night trails and the two men looked at one another a moment in silence.

There was a puzzled expression lurking around Tracer's lips, and taking a seat at the table, for some time he studied his companion's face.

"Miss Lockwood has left the house," said he.

Tripp nodded.

"She left a note behind for me," and Tracer threw a bit of folded paper on the table.

It was just a week after the murder.

Tripp took up the paper and opened it.

"I see," he muttered. "The maid has gone away."

Then he threw the note on the table and relapsed into silence again.

"The man called Nolan has changed his nest again," remarked Silas Tracer.

At this Tripp started a little.

"And Savalli?" he asked.

"Oh, Savalli is still on deck."

"When did you see him last?"

"An hour ago."

"At the nest?"

"No, at the Dove-cote."

"I knew he has got to going there. Let's see. Miss Monk says he and Nick are great friends. See here."

Tripp took from the drawer at his elbow a sheet of paper which was covered with writing.

"I've figured something out," he explained. "You will see here something which, while it may not surprise you, would startle a certain little circle."

Silas adjusted his spectacles and began to read:

"I guess you got it correct," he declared, looking up at Tripp who was smoking serenely in his chair.

"It's all right, Silas."

The detective read on.

"I see the link. No wonder they are good friends."

A smile illumined Tripp's countenance.

What had Tracer read? Let us see.

The sheet was covered with fine, nervous writing, as if it had been done under a strain, and he saw that it was the result of some hours' work. The letters wobbled a good

deal in some places, as if traced by a feeble old man and here and there they were almost unintelligible.

But while Phineas smoked he read it all, as follows:

"I take up my pen, Phineas Tripp, for you, when I would not touch it for all the world besides. I feel that I have reached the brink of life, and that in a short time an old man will have closed his account with Nature. We go out like the snuffing of a candle. Some of us burn far beyond our good years, and others go out early in life, leaving behind them records—for the police!

"That is a hard sentence for an old man like me to write; but it is true. I write it, looking back over my career and watching my footsteps from the time I left the old home, eager to make my own living, and in time to become somebody on the fly-wheel of progress. I come to the dark years of my career with a good deal of diffidence, for I know that what I shall write may tighten the noose around the neck of a fellow creature, and snuff out a life on the scaffold. You, Phineas Tripp, who did me a great service when it was in your power to do an injury still greater, you, I say, shall have this writing, and perhaps you will turn to it thinking what a life I could have given to good, when I threw it away in a foolish hour, to drag out a miserable existence in this great city.

"Royal Legare has been the evil genius of my life. I have seen him amass wealth while I have cowered in the corners, shivering over what I did at his bidding. We grew up together. We were boys on the same farm; but when he ran away from home and the tyranny of a step-father, I panted to follow him and finally did. I went to him across the sea, and we met in London. There I found him installed in good quarters, and he showed me a handful of gold pieces, saying that he could make that many every day by doing a bit of writing. Of course I, a plain country boy—I was little more—was astonished. He took me into his confidence, saying that he would teach me how to make just as much and with the least possible trouble.

"Of course I was elated. We roomed together for the next three years, and I was initiated into my first crimes. Royal Legare had always been a wonderful performer with the pen, and I soon discovered that he was forging bills of credit and exchange on some of the rich men of the Continent. It looked like an easy way to make money, and I was captivated by it. Legare said that it was no harm to rob the rich who got their living off the poor, robbing them, as I have no doubt some of them do, and we worked in our garret, the bills passing from our hands into those of a lot of conscienceless scoundrels who really reaped the cream of the harvest.

"There came a day when our dream was rudely broken. We were told to fly, that the police and detectives of Scotland Yard were after us.

"Royal Legare and I gathered up our little all and fled across the Channel. We went to Paris, but not finding it very safe there, plunged into Spain. Madrid seemed to furnish us with a shelter, and we lived there a year and spent what we had saved from our wicked earnings in London. But all the time there was at our heels, though we knew it not, a man who was destined to drive us from pillar to post on the Continent. This man was a person who had no connection with the police. He had a beautiful young wife with whom Legare fell in love, and for his sake she left her husband, and, while coming to a meeting with my companion, fell under the wheels of a London cab and was killed.

"This accident broke the young husband's dream and he swore to wreck Royal Legare's life and that of his friend, as I was known to be. He it was who put the police on our track in the English capital, and it was from his vengeance that we suddenly fled. This man's name was Marcus Monk, and, left alone with a daughter, after the death of his wife, he seemed to devote his whole life to vengeance. I think he lost sight of us at last, for we had four years of quiet life in India.

"Many years passed, and at last we turned our faces toward America. Royal Legare was rich, but I had comparatively nothing. I had discovered that he always wanted and took the lion's share, and that he did not hesitate to tell me that I should look out for myself, though now and then he sent me a pittance. I believe that it was this very scoundrel who put the police on my track when, driven to desperation, I committed the forgery which landed me in prison. You know all about that, Phineas Tripp. You came forward and gave me your hand, even when you felt that I was guilty, as, indeed, I was. When the prison doors opened to me you were there, and you led me back to a better life though I sometimes wondered if you hadn't a deeper design than to help me become an honest man.

"After my return from prison I saw but little of Royal Legare. I knew that he was rich and that he was leading a very quiet and apparently honest life on the avenue. I knew, too, that one of our foreign acquaintances, a man named Savalli, met by us in Barcelona, was his friend. It wasn't long thereafter that Senor Savalli went 'up the river' for a crime which I will always believe was prompted by Savalli's friend, Legare. It is just like his handiwork, and you will recollect that when asked if he had an accomplice, he denied it bitterly and swore that he was into the matter all by himself.

"Legare came not to see me, though he knew I was poor and afflicted, in the hovel where I have existed since my return to a quiet life. Senor Savalli is a man of nerve and cunning. He has a hand which can throttle a dog as I saw him do one day in the suburbs of Madrid. He is an expert with the dagger and used to tell us how a man could be murdered with a single blow. I have read the report on the post-mortem held over the body of Marcus Monk, the same man, recollect, who swore to hunt Legare down. I recognize in the description of the death-stab the very instructions Savalli used to give us in our foreign quarters. The man who dealt that blow must have learned of him, or must be the man himself. That is a hard thing to say in black and white, Phineas Tripp, and I have thought a full minute before committing this thought to paper. I don't like to accuse any one of murder, but I have written the truth, as I shall

shortly appear before the Judgment Bar of God. Mind you, I don't say that Savalli killed Marcus Monk; but I do say that it was the Savalli blow that took his life, and that if he did not do it, some one who knew the stroke undoubtedly did."

"I have known for some time that Marcus Monk and his daughter were domiciled at Nick Cloman's. I accidentally saw them there one afternoon when I crept past the place on my way to the Battery for a ray of March sun. It may be a good place for parties who want to remain quiet, but do you know that Nick Cloman and Savalli are old friends? When we were in Barcelona Savalli used to get letters from a friend in this country, and one day one of these letters was left in our room, and, curious, I opened it to read that it was signed 'Nick Cloman.' So you see it is a case of blackbird and raven—both very black.

"I can tell you no more, Phineas. I don't know what you will make out of this, nothing very much, perhaps. I have told the truth. I would not tell less now for all the world, for I stand where I can look over beyond the boundary of this life into the misty margin of the Unknown. I know that my hand was not in that dreadful crime of Number Nine, though there are not three persons in New York who would have guessed that I knew the dead man. Remember, I don't say who killed Marcus Monk. I don't know who killed him; but I know that it was the Savalli stroke, downward over the shoulder, and the only man besides myself who learned it from him, so far as I know, is Royal Legare. Take the confession of a broken-down wretch for what it is worth, Phineas Tripp. Heaven bless you for the kindness you showed me when I stood alone at the prison gate without friends.

"ORALL LAGONE."

At the end of the manuscript Silas Tracer handed it back to his companion who took his pipe from between his teeth.

"A queer story," Tracer remarked.

"No queerer than the writer," was the reply. "But every word of it is true."

"I remember Lagone. I recall the interest you took in him. It seems to have repaid you."

Phineas smiled.

"I got this from him last night. He is nearly at the end of the cord. A few more weeks at furthest and the old forger will have crossed the river."

"If not Savalli, then some one who knew the stroke," muttered Tracer.

There was no reply.

"The young man didn't know it," he went on.

"That is true. Garish Legare never saw that stroke delivered. He didn't kill Marcus Monk. I don't care what the police think."

"Neither do I," chimed in Silas who had a way of confirming his partner's opinions.

Phineas took the confession and folded it.

"You say that Miss Lockwood is gone, eh?" he said.

"Yes. She's probably gone away so as not to be questioned any more. They have made the young lady's life a burden to her and she was heartily tired of it."

"No wonder. And Savalli?"

"He is as cool and clever as ever," smiled Tracer. "The man with whom he sometimes visits is not sleeping beneath the sea."

"Of course not. Are you going back to the house to-night?"

"I am."

"Remember that it has not been inhabited since the murder save by the girl who has now gone away, as you tell me. The room where the crime took place has been under lock and key since the post-mortem and the key is at Police Headquarters. Will you take another look for the old key-maker who made the cabinet and key for Garish Legare, or shall I slip out for a little exercise and try to pick him up?"

"You might do that, Phineas. Give me the old house."

Five minutes later a man who would not have been taken for Silas Tracer by that gentleman's friends slipped from the den and took an up-town car.

Reaching a spot near to the house of the crime, he alighted and continued on foot.

It was half-past ten when he gained the back yard of Royal Legare's mansion and taking a key from his pocket, he opened the rear door and let himself in.

The house was dark and still. It had carried its secrets very well, and now that Lyra Lockwood, the only real happy life it had ever held within its walls was gone, it was as disagreeable as a tomb.

The ferret stood for a time in the narrow hall which he had reached by entering at the rear door, and then he moved toward the portal opening upon the scene of the murder.

He unlocked this door despite the fact that the key was at Police Headquarters and then closing it, shut himself within the chamber of some hand's guilt.

In the darkness stood Silas Tracer with the courage of the true ferret. He listened, but heard only the rattle of an occasional vehicle on the street without, and at last he turned on the gas, letting it burn a little, but enough to show him the outlines of the room's furniture.

The desk stood before him as he had seen it last. The chair in which the dead man sat was still there, and Tracer noticed them closely as he went forward.

All at once he stooped and picked up something from the floor.

It was a bit of paper—torn from a daily journal, and as he looked at it he noticed something which startled him just a little.

CHAPTER X.

BACK IN NUMBER NINE.

SILAS looked at the bit of newspaper with the curiosity of one who has found something worth inspecting.

He saw that the torn piece bore the date of the paper and, what surprised him more, was that it was that very day.

Tracer knew that Miss Lockwood had been gone more than forty-eight hours. He was perfectly aware that she had not been in the house for that length of time, yet here was a bit of newspaper which had been printed after her departure, and which he had discovered in the room of the crime.

It told the shrewd detective this and nothing more.

Some one had been to the house since the maid's departure. Some person had dropped that piece of paper on the floor after she had locked the front door behind her and gone to join Garish Legare in his hiding-place.

What more could it tell a man like Silas Tracer?

Putting the bit of paper in his pocket with a smile, the detective looked at the desk.

Tripp had guessed that Marcus Monk had boarded at the Dove-cote by the fact that his left hand had on it a red ink smear, for Nick Cloman kept no other sort of ink about his place—a fancy of his; and the police had come to the conclusion, as had both Tripp and Tracer, that after Miss Lockwood thought her guest had retired for the night, he had gone to the room to find writing materials; but what he had written, if anything, no one knew.

Tracer found the drawers of Royal Legare's desk locked, but he had no difficulty in opening all he wanted to.

He looked through them several times, then shut them and turned away.

There was nothing but the bit of paper to tell him that the house had been visited since Miss Lockwood's vanishment.

Quitting the scene of the crime, the detective made his way to Garish Legare's room. He found the cabinet of daggers before him and, after several trials, he picked the lock and opened the door.

The gas which he had turned on and screened so as not to let a particle of the light pass beyond the shutters, enabled him to examine the young man's collection of blades.

Tripp had told him about his visit to old Cortelono's, where he had been told that two Karan-daggers had been sold, and he knew that with such a blade Marcus Monk had been killed in the home of Royal Legare.

One by one he took down the daggers and looked at them. Some were rare specimens of the dagger-maker's art. They belonged to all parts of the world, but Garish had preferred those which came from Spain and Italy, and in such the cabinet was very rich.

As he drew one of the Italian daggers from its sheath and was about to examine it for its history, he heard a slight noise which sent his hand to the gas-jet and in another moment he was in pitchy darkness.

The cabinet he shut in the gloom, but held in his hand the last blade taken from it, as if the instinct of defense had suddenly taken possession of his mind.

Silas Tracer stood at one side of the room, but all at once he slipped behind Garish Legare's bath curtains where he stood as silent as a Sphinx.

For some time he heard nothing and then he became aware that he was not the sole occupant of the house.

Some one was below, for he heard a door open and shut and then came another silence which was not broken.

Presently the detective glided from the room and leaned over the well polished balustrade as he looked down-stairs.

He could see the door of the fatal room, for it was on the floor beneath him and almost directly underneath his position. The light which came in from the well-lighted street gave him the outlines of the door and he watched it as if it was to prove valuable to him.

Suddenly a faint light was seen over the transom, and he knew the gas in the death-chamber had been turned on by some one there.

Silas did not slip down-stairs, but kept his place.

The light in the chamber was not turned on very much. He saw, though, that it would enable the person in there to see what he was doing, and the more the detective looked the stronger became his desire to see beyond he door.

As several minutes passed with the uncertainty deepening, Silas slipped down the stairs. The carpeted steps gave out no sound, and he stood at last on one from which he could reach the top of the door leading into the fatal room.

He reached out and touched the paper which covered the transom.

He discovered that if he cut it, as he could with his knife, he would have to hang from the casement of the door in an uncomfortable position while he looked down upon the unknown person in the room beyond.

He cut the paper, and grasping the cross-piece of the casement he swung from the steps.

It was trying on the spy's nerves; but he had tried them on many another occasion, and now he hung at random as he glued his eyes to the transom glass and used them to the best effect.

The room was occupied. This he saw at once.

The light was strong enough to enable him to see that a man was seated at the desk with his shoulders turned toward the door.

There was nothing about the man very familiar from the detective's position and he looked at him some time before he moved.

He was writing, using Royal Legare's writing materials, and his head was bent forward like one immersed in his work.

Not a sound came from the chamber of crime. The gas which burned above the unknown showed Silas the appointments of the room and the hat which lay on the floor at the man's chair.

He could see that the face was well covered with a darkish beard and that the hands were rather small and well-formed. He noticed, too, that the man's body filled the chair he sat in just as Royal Legare would have filled it if he had been there.

Every now and then the detective dropped back to the stairs and took second wind and rested his overtaxed muscles.

Then he would return to his place and watch the man again.

This went on for about an hour.

Silas at last grew tired and thought of falling back and watching for the man's exit.

All at once the occupant of the room turned his chair and thrust something into his pocket.

Then he went over to a small steel safe which stood in one corner of the room and stooped before it.

Tracer saw him manipulate the lock and swing back the heavy door.

"Nobody but Royal Legare could do that with such ease," he thought; "and yet the city is saying that he sleeps in mid-ocean with the rest who went down in the Crusader."

The human sleuth-hound laughed to himself.

The man before him took from his pocket what he had written and placed it in the safe.

He hid away in an inner compartment and shut the door, locking it with the combination.

This done he stood up and faced the very door from whose transom the keenest eyes in all the city had watched him.

Detective Tracer now had a good look at his face and figure.

The former was well covered with a dark beard, as he had already seen, the latter was well-knit and rather tall. The man was well-dressed and his hands were white and womanish—just like Royal Legare's hands.

Suddenly the man turned to the desk and picked up his hat from the floor. Silas thought it time to get away from his ticklish position and he fell back with a sigh of relief.

The hanging along the wall had tried his iron nerves more than anything else could have done, and he inwardly thanked the stranger for the relief his movements gave him.

Hidden at the top of the stairs among the shadows which lurked there, the detective heard the door below open and shut and the next moment some one was walking through the hall.

Not until he had heard the rear door shut did he move and then he dodged through a room from which a view of the back yard could be obtained on ordinary occasions.

It was dark enough outside, but a bar of light falling momentarily from the side window of an adjacent house showed Silas a figure which crossed it and was gone in an instant.

It was the figure of the man who had just left the house, and when it had vanished, the ferret turned back.

He might have slipped from the place, and discovered the intruder, but he did not. He might have tracked him home, if he had one, and seen him in another garb; but he remained cooped up within the walls of Number Nine.

Royal Legare might be at the bottom of the sea, but the man who had hidden the paper in the steel safe was as well acquainted with the combination as Legare himself.

Tracer went back to the room. He examined the pens, and saw that fresh ink shone on their nibs. He looked in the several drawers and discovered that some sheets of paper had been taken out since his last inspection.

Then he went over to the safe.

It withheld from him the very thing he wanted to look at. It stubbornly refused to give up its secret, keeping him out with the persistence of fate.

"Curse it! I might have known that I am not burglar enough for the emergency," grinned Silas Tracer. "I was not cut out for a cracksman; therefore this little bit of steel mechanism baffles me. But wait. I like to get at secrets, and I will get at yours!" and he stood off and grinned at the safe as it stood in its corner, having kept him out.

"Lost at sea, eh?" exclaimed the detective. "Sunk with the Crusader? I'll bet my head that you're as dry as a duck, Royal Legare."

Silas Tracer looked at his watch and noted the hour.

He slipped from the house, crossed the back yard and vanished. Presently he turned up in a wind-swept street, on each side of which gleamed the lights of low dens from which came oaths and snatches of drunken songs.

Tracer kept on until he reached a door which was cast in shadow.

It had no bell, therefore he was obliged to knock, which he did, to have it pulled open by a child, who looked at him as her hand threatened to shut the portal in his face.

She let him in, however, and Silas passed across a dingy room and opened a door beyond without being shown the way by the child.

A man looked at him a moment and sprung up from a couch in one corner of this den.

He sat on the edge of the couch and glared at Tracer with the eye of a madman.

"You want me, don't you? You want me for the Marible affair. I might have known that they would set you at my heels! Come here, Josie. I am going away with this man."

The detective smiled at the man's fright, and as the flaxen-haired child ran to his arms, he stepped forward and his hand fell upon the burglar's shoulder.

"You are not to kiss Josie good-by this

time, Coppers. I am not to take you off with me. I have a job for you."

The man looked bewildered.

"A job for me?" he echoed.

"Yes. It is in the line of your profession, too."

"What? You don't want me to crack a safe, do you, Silas Tracer?"

"That's just what I want done."

The burglar let Josie slip from his embrace, and springing up he clutched the detective's arm.

"Come over here. Josie, go into the other room and mend Mopsy's dress. Mopsy's a doll, and the little one will thus be out of our hearing."

Silas Tracer and Coppers, the burglar, were together and the ferret proceeded:

"I want some papers which may prove very valuable in a case we are on just now. They are shut up in a little steel safe."

"Combination lock, of course?"

"Yes. You know what they are, Coppers."

The man's eyes glittered with genuine delight.

"That Marible affair was well done. You simply caught the combination, didn't you?"

"That's what. I'd pride myself on that bit of business, even if you had taken me off for it. Where is the safe?"

"It is in Number Nine, —th avenue."

The burglar fell back with an exclamation of astonishment, while his hard face paled.

"Why, there's where—"

"Yes, there's where it took place," put in the ferret as Coppers broke his own sentence.

"You're not superstitious, eh, Coppers?"

"I believe in nearly everything since Josie's mother died," was the reply.

"Pshaw! there's no one in the old house. The safe stands in the room, 'tis true; but you won't be disturbed. I'll go with you if you say so."

"That's not necessary, Tracer. Tell me where to bring the swag to, and I'll do the rest."

"You'll go, then?"

"For you, yes. I wouldn't do it for any other living creature. I wouldn't do it for myself if a million dollars were in that little safe. What shall I take from it?"

"Only a roll of writing which you will find right on the inside—a roll tied with a desk cord. Bring that to me, Coppers."

"When shall I go?"

"Could you go to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then let it be to-night. Bring the package to our rooms. You know where we are."

"You shall have it if the spirits don't get me," laughed the burglar of Winesap Alley.

CHAPTER XI.

NUMBER NINE'S SECOND MYSTERY.

TRACER, the ferret, had confidence in Coppers, the law-breaker.

Coppers was an expert in his line and the detective knew that he would play his part of the game as well as any one could play it. His only fear was that the man might, at the last moment, become superstitious, like many of his class, and back out, if not come to the office, frankly stating the reasons for his failure.

Tracer went home and waited for Coppers. He was alone, for Phineas Tripp was out and Bobbles had not dropped in.

Time waned and the clock of Gotham ticked off the minutes of what was to be another eventful night.

Silas Tracer, waiting for the burglar and his treasure, did not stir from his chair till after midnight. He occupied himself with a book, save when he gave way to thought as he watched the door, which did not open to admit the man he wanted to see.

At last footsteps came up the steps and approached the portal.

"At last!" said the detective. "I did not think it would take him so long."

Instead of a knock, the key turned in the lock and Phineas Tripp walked in.

Tracer started as he looked at his partner, who came forward and without a word took a chair and looked into the fire.

"All alone, Silas?" said Tripp.

"Yes."

"Been so long?"

"All night."

"Humph," and Tripp's eyes went back to the blaze and again he lapsed into silence.

Something puzzled the pigmy ferret of the famous firm. He seemed to be mystified, for he sat silent longer than was his wont, while Silas Tracer watched him and the door.

Coppers might turn up yet.

"Royal Legare," said Tripp suddenly, speaking aloud. "He's a mystery, Silas."

"Why so, Phineas?"

"Lost at sea, you know. Ha, ha!"

"Do you really think so, Phineas?"

In answer to this query Tripp turned his face toward his partner and smiled.

"Do I think so?" and he ran one hand into his bosom and drew out something wrapped in tissue-paper.

Tracer watched him open it and when it was revealed, behold, a dagger lay on the table. It was incased in a black sheath and Tracer reached over and took it up.

"Did you find this where it may have belonged to Legare?" asked Silas.

Phineas Tripp shook his head.

"What was I saying about Legare?"

"You just remarked that he was a mysterious person."

"Ah! So he is. But that blade? Look at it. It is just like the one that killed Marcus Monk, eh?"

"Exactly like it," and Tracer turned the dagger over and over in his silken brown hands.

"I ran across it to-night," said Tripp.

"In Savalli's rooms, then?"

"No."

Tracer fell back, resolved to guess no more.

"I guess you are at the end of the string. I did not find it in Legare's possession nor in Savalli's room. I found it in Miss Lyra Lockwood's room."

Tracer seemed to start.

"In the maid's room?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"But she is no longer in the house, you know."

"That is true. She has taken lodgings in another part of the city."

"With Garish Legare?"

"No. But not far from him. The young man, as yet, does not know how near she is. Yes, I stole this blade from her room."

Tracer laid the dagger down and turned full face to his companion.

"And do you think—"

"Trickery," broke in Tripp, with a smile. "The devil's schemes. I happened to find where the maid was and the next thing was to visit her. That wasn't very hard to do, Silas, but I failed to find her in. I was alone in her rooms, and then I began to look about, just to see how she was fixed, you know. Well, my hand, in course of wandering about, unearthed this dagger which she had stowed away in a strange part of the room. It was actually hidden. You remember that Garish Legare claims that the Karan dagger was stolen from his cabinet, but that he does not remember when. Well, this is a Karan. Old Cortelono would tell you so if you were to go to go to him and trouble him with the query. What took it to Miss Lockwood's room, and why was it so hidden that it took my keen eyes to ferret it out?"

Silas Tracer made no reply.

He was looking into the Sphinx-like face of Phineas Tripp, and for a moment he believed that that person had found a startling clue to the murder of Marcus Monk.

"It looks against the girl," said Tripp, continuing. "I know that a dagger was found in the room where the old man was killed. It was a Karan and you saw it on the table when you went there the morning Bobbles brought us the news."

The interested Tracer nodded.

"This may be the same dagger."

"Not the same one. When it left Royal Legare's house it was in Joe Grabbem's hands."

"So it was. Well, if you were to ask Mr. Grabbem what became of it he would take you to one side and confess that his house had been robbed."

"When did the robbery occur?"

"Last night."

"What was taken?"

"Nothing but a few things, but among them was the deadly dagger."

Tracer grinned.

"And you say you found that one in the room occupied by Miss Lockwood, Royal Legare's housekeeper?"

"I found it there."

The two detectives sat silent for some moments. What their thoughts were they did not tell one another, and three minutes passed before either spoke.

Tracer rose and picked up the hat he had thrown on the table when he entered to wait for Coppers.

"Going out?" said Tripp.

"Yes."

"It's nearly day now."

"That's why I'm going out."

The door opened and closed under Tracer's hand. He was watched by the little Tripp as he crossed the threshold and vanished.

"Found in Miss Lockwood's room," muttered Silas in the scant hall. "That may all be, but I don't believe the girl had a hand in the murder. I'll see about Coppers. I can get back to the house before the day comes."

He made his way to Winesap Alley, his body breasting the cold wind of March as it swept the streets and chilled him to the bone. It was a dismal walk and when he rapped at the door of Coppers's room it was opened by the little girl, Josie, who started as she caught sight of the detective.

"Where's Coppers, girl?" asked Silas Tracer.

"He isn't in yet. He went out soon after you went off and I don't know what keeps him."

"I'll find out, child," was the reply and Tracer turned from the house.

"Not back yet. The safe must be giving him a good deal of trouble, but I don't see why it should. There's no better burglar than Coppers, and a safe like the one in Royal Legare's house ought not to give him a great deal of work."

He hastened up town. Few people met him and those who did did not know that the tireless detective of the metropolis was abroad in the darkest hour which precedes the day.

Silas Tracer reached the back yard of the Legare mansion and again found his way into the house.

As he turned into the hall leading to the room where stood the object of Coppers's promised attack, a clock in the nearest steeple struck three times, clear and distinct.

The old house seemed silent enough and Tracer gently opened the door of the fatal room.

As he shut it the very silence seemed to tell him that a shock was in store for him.

He advanced to the drop light on the desk and struck a match.

Touching the little bluish flame to the burner, he saw the interior of the chamber and looked toward the steel safe.

In another instant he had sprung forward and was looking at something doubled up on the floor in front of the closed doors of the treasure-house.

It was the body of a man, and as Tracer stooped lower and pulled one of the arms from across the face, he looked down into the terrified but rigid countenance of Coppers, the safe-breaker.

The man was dead—dead in front of his last safe!

Silas Tracer felt a strange feeling take possession of him. He thought of the burglar's little *protegee* who would be left without a protector, and perhaps he recalled the fact that it was himself who had sent Coppers to his doom.

When he became himself again the detective began to examine the body.

Coppers seemed to have been caught in the act, for he lay directly in front of the safe, as if the hand of murder had cut him down even when his fingers were at the combination.

Tracer went back to the table and carried the drop-light toward the dead man.

He saw something which until then had escaped his keen eye.

Coppers had been murdered just as Marcus Monk had been.

There was a dagger wound in the same place and when he opened the burglar's shirt he saw a wound like that made by the Karan dagger.

The old detective turned to the table and then searched the room. The assassin had come and gone like a shadow. He had left

no clue behind. This time there was no instrument of death on the desk, and no blade in the heart of the dead house-breaker.

All at once the detective caught hold of the knob of the safe door, and as he pulled back he was astonished to see that the steel portal swung open.

Royal Legare's little safe stood open for the ferret's inspection. For a moment he was disconcerted by this startling event, but presently he began to ransack the safe. What had become of the roll of papers which had been the death of Coppers? Where were they now that the safe in which he had seen them hidden was open and at his mercy?

In vain did Silas Tracer search the safe for the roll. It was not there, and he knew it was not to be found on the dead burglar's body.

"The dagger found him just as it found Monk," said the ferret to himself as he turned back and from the corner of the desk looked at the figure on the floor. "This is chapter second in the mystery of the avenue, and Number Nine has taken a new start in the annals of red crime."

He concluded to leave the new case for the police. To reveal it in person would be to be mixed up in it himself, and he argued that such a thing would hamper him and Tripp in working up the Marcus Monk mystery.

So he left the dead man where he had found him.

Tracer crept from the house as noiselessly as he had entered it. He left it guarded by the dead, and with the light out once more it was to remain in darkness till the hand of some policeman opened the shutters and let in God's sunlight upon the dead, cold face of the stricken burglar.

The discovery came sooner than Tracer expected it would. A man sent to the house by the gas company made the terrible discovery of Coppers's doom, and the matter fell at once into the hands of the police.

Of course the affair got into the newspapers and Number Nine took on more ghastly celebrity, while Tracer and Phineas Tripp read the accounts with smiles; but kept their secret like Sphinxes.

"Another one in the same horrid house? My God!" cried a beautiful girl who almost dropped the newspaper she had been reading, and falling back in the arm-chair, she looked toward the door which led from her room and seemed to lose breath.

Rana Monk, still beneath the roof of the Dove-cote, had picked up the paper which Nick Cloman, the landlord, had sent in to her and had caught sight of the account of the second crime in Number Nine, the old house which had been so fatal to her father.

The next moment the door opened and the landlord of the Dove-cote walked into the room. Rana looked at him with her face still pale from the discovery just made.

"The gentleman who is willing to help you in any way is in the office, miss," said Nick.

Rana's thoughts went back to the letter which she had found on the table after her return from the cemetery and which, at the two detectives' suggestion, she had answered.

"I will see him now," said Rana. "You may send him in if you please, Mr. Cloman."

The landlord withdrew and Rana, taking on new courage, watched the door for the first sight of the unknown helper.

It opened presently and he stood before her, a well dressed gentleman; but the possessor of eyes which, from the first, caught the girl's attention.

She had seen them before—there was no doubt of this.

CHAPTER XII.

A HAWK IN THE DOVE-COTE.

RANA MONK's visitor stood near the door waiting for her invitation to be seated, and when it was extended he came over toward her and took a chair.

He was a man past thirty and rather sal-low of skin. But the hue was natural, as the girl saw, and his sparkling eyes seemed to tell her that they had opened for the first time under a tropical sun.

His figure was lithe and well dressed. His hands were incased in dark-brown gloves which fitted them so well as to show Rana the whole contour of the hands. He would have been handsome in the girl's eyes if she

had not recalled her adventure while on the way to the detectives' den when she encountered on the street a man who had a face just like her visitor's, and whose whole outline was an exact resemblance of the body in the chair.

Surely this was the same man. There was no doubt in the young girl's mind, and she now saw why Phineas Tripp had advised her to answer the letter signed "Confidence," which she had left in Nick Cloman's care.

"My letter has prepared you somewhat for this call," began the man, and Rana noticed the slightly foreign accent. "I could not help writing it after the—the sad accident to your father, and when I saw you thrown helpless on the world my hand went to the pen almost mechanically."

"I am sure you are very kind," answered Rana.

"Do not mention it, please. There need be no further secrecy as to my identity. I am Vijal Savalli, and my native land is Spain, as you, an observant lady, no doubt have guessed ere this. We Spaniards cannot conceal our identity from the observing very long, therefore I believe in fair dealing. V. Savalli is a name which may be entirely unknown to you, but I trust it is an honorable one, and that you will have no reason to connect it with anything not right and just."

When he paused he was leaning toward the girl, but he suddenly fell back and crossed his legs.

"I can't say that I need the assistance hinted at in your letter. Father left me a little something and I can work if it becomes necessary. Indeed, I have already addressed several letters to different houses in the city, and am waiting for their replies now."

"Do you mean that, miss?" asked Savalli. "Your hands are very white, I see, and you have not had to depend on their labor for what you have enjoyed."

"That is true. Father was a man of genius, and we did not suffer for the necessities of life while he lived."

"I might have guessed that," said Savalli. "It was a very sad occurrence. And they have not discovered the perpetrator?"

"Not yet," answered Rana, with a slight start, which she hoped he did not see. "The detectives, I fear, have given up the matter and we shall never have the dark mystery solved."

"They give up these cases too soon. They admit themselves baffled by mysteries which the commonest of their kind ought to ferret out in a few hours."

"Do you think so, Mr. Savalli?"

"Why shouldn't I, when I have seen so much of their actions? Why, this new crime—you have seen the papers, of course, for I see this morning's on your table yonder—this new crime, I say, should give them a clue perhaps to the other. What was that dead burglar doing in the old house? That is a question for the police of New York to answer, but what will they do?"

Vijal Savalli leaned back and laughed till the echo of it filled the little room. Rana thought that his face changed while he laughed, and that his eyes seemed to get another shade of light. He pressed his own hands somewhat nervously while he enjoyed himself, but all at once he stopped and looked at Rana.

"Your father was a traveler, was he not?"

"He had traveled some?"

"Abroad?"

"I believe so."

"Pardon me, Miss Monk, but were you born in this country?"

"I was born in England—London—in a little house near Piccadilly Circus."

"I thought you were not American. My observation of people in a somewhat rambling life has given me quite an insight into physiognomy. Piccadilly Circus! Do you remember anything about your life in London?"

"I don't see why I should not recall it?" said Rana.

"Your mother? Was she English, too?"

"She came from Scotland. Mother's fate was as terrible as father's."

"Accidental death?"

"Yes, sir. She was killed by a cab, which ran her down in a fog. I was quite small then, but I recollect the terrible acci-

dent, for, young as I was, it sunk into my heart—the first shadow of my life."

Savalli watched Rana for a few moments, and then said:

"Did you remain long in London after that? I would suppose your father would not care so stay in a city which had such memories for him."

"I remained in London, but papa went abroad," said Rana. "He went nearly all over the world, I believe, for when he came back he had souvenirs from many countries."

"Traveled a good deal, didn't he?"

"A great deal," echoed Rana.

"After awhile you concluded to come to America, did you?"

"I had no part in the resolution. Father concluded to come, and of course I accompanied him. But it was a sad move for us. Better had we stayed in England, despite its memories of death and sorrow."

"And so you do not think you need help at this time?"

The abruptness of the question startled Rana Monk.

"I do not need assistance. I have written to certain business houses, as I have told you, and I prefer to make my own way through the world."

"But you find this a pleasant place, don't you?"

"It is quiet here and they have told me that I need not give up my rooms."

"That is just like my friend Nick," smiled Savalli. "You will find him ready to do you any favor you need and if he should not do it, please call on me."

"But I do not know where to find you."

Savalli took from his pocket a little card on which he scribbled something, after which he handed it to Rana.

Glancing at the card, which she did not inspect minutely, Rana thanked him for his offers of kindness and continued:

"You seem to have known my father," said she. "From the fact that you have offered to assist me, I judge that he was not altogether unknown to you."

The color in Savalli's face changed. Rana Monk noticed it and saw that he turned his head to avoid her gaze.

"I can't help sympathizing with the helplessness," he answered. "I heard of your helplessness through the newspapers and, then, Nick told me just how you were situated. The hands of V. Savalli are at your service whenever you can use them."

He stood erect before her chair and she could not help noticing the tiger-like agility of his supple figure.

Any one would have known by seeing him as he stood thus that he was a Spaniard and that he was capable of doing things which called for coolness and activity.

"You may address me as before, or, if pressed, and very needy, you may come to my rooms which you will find on the card on the table. I live alone there and I am always ready to help you."

He went toward the door with a noiseless tread, but with one of his gloved hands on the knob he suddenly turned back and then crossed the room half-way.

"Of course you have seen the detectives, Miss Monk?" said Savalli.

What should Rana say? She thought very rapidly while the eyes of the Spaniard were riveted upon her.

Should she tell him that she had been to Tripp & Tracer's den, that she had interested those merciless ferrets in her case and that they were not to quit the trail until they had ferreted out the dark mystery of Number Nine?

"It was natural that I should go to the detectives!" she said. "They would have taken the case up anyhow. Yes, sir, I went to them as I believed it was my duty and—"

"Your duty? Certainly!" broke in Savalli. "I would have blamed you if you had held aloof. Vengeance is a duty. At least my people believe so and practice it. You went to the best detectives, didn't you, miss?"

"I tried to seek the best. I went to Messrs. Tripp and Tracer."

"To the best, then. That was right. I could not have advised you better. And they are at work? Good! I would like to know what they have done, but these fellows keep their secrets so well that you might as

well try to fathom the sea and get at some of its secrets. They will unearth the mystery, if any human beings can. They won't let young Legare, the sot, slip through their hands as he seems to have slipped through the clutches of the police."

"You believe, then, that he knew something about the crime?"

"Why shouldn't he know when the newspapers all say that one of his daggers was found in the bosom of your father, miss? And this young bacchanal has vanished! I am told that the police were ready to lay hands on him when presto! the scene changes and he is gone. If innocent, why does he hide? But pardon me. I did not seek you to recall the dark crime in this manner, nor to argue the matter which just now is bothering the police. I am at your service. V. Savalli."

He lifted his hat at the door and the following moment Rana Monk saw it close on his supple figure.

She stood in front of her chair breathless for half a minute after his departure. It seemed to her that something unaccountable had occurred, that she had looked into a face which was destined to remain photographed on her mind all through her life.

Mechanically she turned to the card on the table and picked it up. Carrying it to the window, she read it again and then slipped it into her pearl pocketbook where she resolved to let it remain till needed.

The stairway which led to her room led also to the office of Nick Cloman's so-called hotel.

Rana saw that in departing Savalli had not latched the door and that it stood slightly ajar.

She crossed the room for the purpose of shutting it when she caught the sound of voices and at the door she stopped and involuntarily listened.

The first voice she heard was that of her late visitor.

"She's as pretty as her mother was," said Savalli, talking to some one in the office below.

"Of course I don't know anything about that."

"Well, she is, though. She has her mother's eyes, and, so far I can recall the woman's characteristics, the voice of the daughter is the same."

"But she don't need help?" asked Nick Cloman.

"No, but she will. She will!" emphasized Savalli. "She will, Nick, old comrade. The pretty dove in the Cote will need the hand of Vijal Savalli before she is very much older."

Rana fell back from the door, suppressing a cry which, if uttered, would have reached the men down-stairs.

"I left my card with her," continued the Spaniard. "I will be there only when she is looking for me. You understand, Nick, and you will see that I am not sought for by her till the right time comes. I didn't expect to find her so communicative. She has written out for employment. You will handle the letters first, for all are delivered to you, aren't they?"

"All."

"I thought so. You will see them first, I say. I must leave a good deal of the game in your hands, Nick. You have never failed me yet."

Rana heard Nick Cloman's laugh.

"You've seen the papers, Vijal?" asked the landlord.

"I always see them."

"Then you know what happened at Number Nine?"

There was no reply. Rana would have given a good deal to have looked into the office at that moment; but her position barred out the sight.

The silence lasted a few minutes. It was broken again by the voice of Savalli, the Spaniard.

"You know where to find us at any time," he said. "I need leave no address with you, Nick."

"How is the captain?"

"Oh, he's all right. He has been out several times since has passed right under the noses of the police and detectives. And they have lost the young chap completely. What a set of fools these trailing dogs are to be sure, Nick."

"Sometimes they show a good deal of shrewdness."

"But not enough in this case. You will send for me if anything happens."

"I'll send."

The voices ceased and Rana Monk heard the door open and shut.

She went to the window which looked down upon the street and saw the figure of Savalli come out upon the steps.

He stood there as he buttoned his coat about his agile form and stepping down, he hurried off, watched by the fatherless girl whose heart was still beating fast over what she had heard from the door of her room.

As she turned from the window the door opened and the face of Nick Cloman was seen.

"Nice gentleman that, Miss Rana?" said the landlord of the Dove-cote.

"He seemed to be," replied the girl. "You have known him a long time, haven't you, Mr. Cloman?"

"No, indeed. We haven't been friends very long. But I have investigated and I know he is all right. You can tie to him, miss."

Nick bowed himself out and the eyes of the orphan instantly flashed.

"You lie, Nicholas Cloman, you deliberately lie, and my friend, Silas Tracer and Phineas Tripp, will prove it to your satisfaction one of these days!" and she went back to her little chair and remained there in deep thought while the minutes passed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SAVALLI STROKE.

THERE was one man whom Phineas Tripp did not forget, and this was Orall Lagone, the writer of the startling "confession," which we have read with Tracer in the detective's den.

This confession, which detailed to some extent the lives of both Royal Legare and Savalli, was written by a man who was near the boundaries of the eternal world, and who, in the course of a few hours, was to see its portals open to receive his soul.

While Silas Tracer was thinking of the dead body of Coppers, the burglar, on the floor of the fatal chamber of Number Nine, Phineas Tripp had slipped down several of the darkest streets of New York, and had pulled up in front of a low browed door which let him into a miserable hovel.

The little shadow found there the very man he expected to find, and a pair of eyes, unnaturally bright, looked at him as he took a chair and leaned his dwarfish body forward and eyed the man extended on a couch.

The occupant of the bed was Orall Lagone, reduced to a shadow, and with nothing of his former self left but the eyes.

"You've read it, eh?" grinned the man on the couch. "I thought it would bring you here."

"It's a wonderful story; I handed it to Silas and let him read it."

"Well?"

"It astonished him."

"But he did not doubt it?"

"No."

"I thought you might, seeing what I have been."

"That's all right, Lagone. How are you feeling?"

"You can tell by looking at this."

The man opened his shirt in front, and the detective placed his hand over his heart.

"It's been beating that way for two days. I can count the beats without trouble. I know where I am just as well as the doctors can tell me. But what have you done?"

"In the Marcus Monk case?"

"Of course. What have you and your partner done, I say? The papers lie over yonder. I have followed the matter by the newspapers as well as I could, but that isn't very satisfactory. They seem to suspect the young man, Garish Legare, I believe they call him. I don't say that you suspect him; but what the papers give me seem to be the ideas of the police. Do you know, Phineas Tripp, that he never did it—never in the world. He never knew that Savalli stroke."

"What was it like? How was it done?"

Lagone smiled and seemed to pull himself together.

"I know how Savalli used to show us in Barcelona and even in India, whither he fol-

lowed us after we had to fly from France, because Marcus Monk was keeping the continental police hot on our track. Did you see Marcus Monk dead in the chair?"

"No. That fell to Tracer's lot."

"But Tracer told you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Sit in the chair as you understand he was discovered by the maid—Miss Lockwood; you see I am keeping track of the names that appear in this red maze. There! is that about the way he seemed to have sat when he was killed?"

"I think so, Lagone."

Phineas Tripp had fixed himself in the chair as he understood Marcus Monk was found in the Legare mansion, and the death-stricken law-breaker crept from the couch.

"I've got nothing but a rusty old blade which I picked up abroad and which I have clung to ever since. It's nothing like the keen-edged knife which found Marcus. You have a looking glass right before you, Phineas, and I guess the light is strong enough to show you the Savalli crawl and stroke."

"I can see you very plainly, Lagone; but don't over-exert yourself."

"Never mind," laughed Orall Lagone. "I will take pleasure in showing you in New York what Royal Legare and I learned from Señor Savalli in Spain. Are you ready now?"

"Quite ready."

Clutching the knife in his skeleton-like fingers, Orall Lagone vanished for a moment while Phineas Tripp watched the polished surface of the mirror.

It was a pantomime worth looking at, though his blood seemed to chill when he saw the pale man sneaking upon him like an assassin with the blade of the old dagger lying along his arm like the blade of a Venetian bravo.

Step by step, noiseless and sneaking, the pretended slayer approached Tripp.

"I caught the Savalli step to perfectness for he did it so often for us," whispered Lagone, as he came on. "I had the whole scene seared on my brain, as it were, and time has not effaced it, no, nor the dark terrors of coming death."

Nearer and nearer to the detective came the man with the knife. Phineas watching the looking glass saw the uplifted hand, and if he had been less confident—less determined, he might have believed that his days were almost numbered.

All at once the left hand of Lagone swooped down over the ferret's head and in another instant he was thrown back in the chair, while the dagger carried by the right hand swooped down in the other direction and the hilt suddenly struck him over the heart.

He had seen it all by the mirror. He could realize how the murderer had come upon Marcus Monk in Number Nine; how the red-handed assassin had crept upon him from the shades of the other room; and how the "Savalli stroke" had ended his career.

"That's the blow—that's the one which used to hold me spell-bound with horror abroad!" laughed Orall Lagone, as he dropped the dagger and threw himself upon the couch to recover what strength the effort had cost him. "Many's the time Savalli did it for us. He used to say that no one could resist when caught that way."

"I could not have resisted you, Lagone. You had me at your mercy."

"I know that. Don't you see that Marcus Monk was helpless from the moment the dread left hand came down over his head? If there had been a mirror in front of him he might have seen the face of the slayer; but his time was too short for him to have profited by the vision."

"And Royal Legare? Did he ever practice what Savalli taught you two?"

"I caught him at it once. I entered the room rather suddenly and he had rigged up a dummy in a chair and was stealing upon it a la Savalli."

"How did he make out?"

"Splendidly. Royal Legare was always imitative. He was the aptest person I ever saw—could imitate a signature within a minute after seeing it. No wonder he got rich forging paper on the notables of the Continent."

"And do you think that the same hand which killed Marcus Monk finished Coppers, the burglar?"

Orall Lagone thought for a full minute.

"I have read everything I could about the last crime; but I don't know, Phineas. The man, I understood, was killed probably on the floor in front of the safe."

"I think so from what Silas says."

"You see that position would not be a very good one for the Savalli stroke."

"But the strokes seem to have been the same. The wounds are identical."

Orall Lagone crossed the room, watched by the little detective and stopping in one corner he said:

"Call the stand yonder the steel safe, Phineas. Get down there as Coppers might have knelt in front of Royal Legare's treasury. Ah, there you have it. We'll see now."

Lagone dropped to the floor and with his body almost touching the carpet he crawled upon the detective, knife in hand. It was to some extent the same sneak over again; but this time it was more the crawl of the panther which creeps through the grass with its belly brushing the ground.

All at once Phineas Tripp felt the swooping hand and then the quick, lightning-like downward blow that landed the hilt of the dagger against his heart.

"It could be done. I take it back," said Lagone with a laugh, as he rose and once more tottered back to the couch. "I only imitated one of Savalli's sneaks—the only ground crawl I ever saw him make. But Royal liked it best."

"He did?"

"He said it was more pantherish, and reminded him of the panthers of his native country. I believe Royal Legare would have made a better success of the ground crawl than Savalli. He was built the better for it; had better use of his nether limbs in bending them, and so on. But never mind; the same blow killed both Marcus Monk and Coppers. What's become of the girl—Rana—now?"

"I believe she occupies the same quarters—the Dove-cote down in the triangle."

"There yet? It's Nick Cloman's place, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The man who used to write to Savalli."

"So you have said."

"Phineas, I don't expect to see you lay hands on the guilty, for I am nearing the boundary line of the Unknown. But take a bit of advice from Orall, whom you befriended when his friends could have been counted on the fingers of one hand. Watch Nick Cloman! You will find him hand in glove with Vijal Savalli. He is as sleek as butter to his enemies; but when he cares to show his claws, he can be as fierce as a tiger-cat. And where there are dividends, no matter what is to be done, there you will find this human jackal of New York. The girl, Rana Monk, is in positive danger while she occupies that house with two such watchful villains as Savalli and Nick Cloman to play their hands out. Reach me that bottle yonder, Phineas."

Phineas Tripp sprang up and reached down a bottle which stood on a narrow shelf.

Orall Lagone drank of its contents and seemed to revive.

"I ought to tell you, Phineas," said he, leaning toward the detective, who watched every pulsation of life, as it were. "I thought I would keep it back from you till the end; but I don't think it would be right."

The shadow said nothing, but looked into the face before him.

"I don't think I ought to pass away with a secret of such terrible moment on my soul," Lagone went on. "I feel it tearing my heart-strings as I talk, and while something tries to keep it back, I believe that I ought to tell the whole truth."

"Is it about the crime of Number Nine, Lagone?"

"It is about that crime," gasped the man on the bed, clutching the black neck of the bottle till his fingers seemed to lose themselves in the glass. "I was out that night—the first one I had been out in in three months. I went to see him once more, for I did not know that he had engaged passage for Cuba. You will know that I wanted to look once more into the eyes of the man who dragged me into crime when I was but a youth. I was a little stronger then than I am now; but I resolved to see him. I knew

nothing of the guest Miss Lockwood had that night. I was not aware that Marcus Monk was in the house till I saw him there."

"You saw him there, did you, Lagone?"

"As I look into your face, I did; and the moment I saw him I knew him for the man who had had us hounded from pillar to post in Europe. How did I get into the house? I'll tell you. I simply entered like a common burglar. I wanted to meet Royal Lagone and no one else, and I was afraid that if I rung, I would see the maid or even Garish, the adopted son. Well, I didn't care to see either, so I sneaked into the house much in the manner Savalli would sneak upon a victim. I saw a light in the room on the left-hand side of the hall and thinking that Legare was there I went forward."

"I found the door unlocked and I opened it without noise. A man was seated at the desk. His back was turned to me and I knew almost for certain that I had seen those very shoulders in London. When he partially turned his head I saw that I was looking at Marcus Monk. What fate had brought him to that house, I asked myself? Why had he, our old enemy, sought out the home of Royal Legare? I stood like a fool in the hall until I heard some one open and shut a door overhead. The next instant I fell back and hugged the wall of the passage where it was darkest and a man came down-stairs. It was Garish Legare."

"You may believe how well I hugged that wall for I did not want to be seen in the house. The young man's steps were unsteady. He stopped at the foot of the stairs and then vanished in the room to the left. He remained in there perhaps three minutes when he came out and staggered back. Presently he came down-stairs again and I saw him let himself out of the house. The next moment I had turned my attention to the man in the room again, but the moment I opened the door I saw that his position had changed. He was now sitting almost bolt upright in the chair and the position startled me. I stole forward; I looked down over his shoulder and saw the dagger which was buried to the hilt in his heart. Horror-stricken, I fled from the house. I don't know how I ever got home with the secret all my own; but I found myself on the floor of this room at daylight while the reporters were writing up the terrible crime of Number Nine. This is what I have kept back, Phineas, because it was against one whom I believe innocent of murder. Garish Legare was in the room that night. He came out with something like a roll of notes in his hands, and he threw at the foot of the stairs a glove which I picked up and afterward burned. It was a bloody glove; it fairly dripped blood; but, nearing the Unknown as I am, not for the world would I condemn that young man. He never learned the Sayalli stroke."

"Unless," said Phineas Tripp, "unless he had seen his adopted father practice it in the mansion."

"Great heavens! I never thought of that," cried Orall Lagone.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITHIN AN ACE OF DEATH.

SILAS TRACER, conscientious and kind-hearted though a tracker of men, felt that he had a duty to perform toward the little child left alone in the world by the death of Coppers.

The detective argued that if he had not sent the burglar upon the fatal mission, Josie would still have a protector, and after thinking over the matter and consulting Phineas, he resolved to remove the child from the purlieu of Winesap Alley and take her to a better home where in time she might forget that she had been a robber's *protegee* and finally blossom into a good woman.

With this desire for the time shutting out his resolves to ferret out the mystery of Number Nine, at the same hour when Phineas Tripp was watching the startling pantomimes performed by Orall Lagone, Silas Tracer entered Winesap Alley.

The night was darker there than elsewhere he always thought, as he threaded the shades of the place. There was something so forbidding there that it took a cool heart to pass down the rough stones and listen to the songs of nightly crime and now and then catch glimpses of nocturnal sin.

Silas reached the house and knocked. The girl opened the door and this time smiled faintly as he entered the house.

Josie had heard about the second crime of the mansion. She had crept from the hovel to look into the face of her only friend, and Rockaway Mag, her nearest neighbor, had piloted her to and from the Morgue.

Josie shut the door, and to Tracer's surprise, bolted it.

He had never seen her display this amount of caution before.

"Why do you lock the door, Josie?" he asked.

"To keep the man out."

"What, have you been visited?"

"Yes, sir. To-night a man came to the door and I let him in, seeing that he was well-dressed. He came in and caught me by the arm, and as he held me out and looked into my face, I felt frightened. His hand was gloved, and it seemed to sink to the bone as he held me. 'You were his gal, were you?' he said. I asked him whose 'gal,' and he answered: 'Coppers's.' I told him what Coppers had done for me—how he had picked me up, somewhere, I don't know where, and he laughed again and asked me if I had seen Coppers lately. I told him how Rockaway Mag and I went to the dead-house and how I looked at the best friend I ever had, no matter if he wasn't as good as other people are. He dropped me so quickly that I almost fell to the floor, and when I looked again he was gone."

"You say he wore gloves, Josie?"

"Yes, sir; they was brown, like this old dress of mine. And his eyes—they shone like I don't know what; and he had a dark mustache which was waxed at the ends like a dandy's."

"He didn't attempt to take anything, did he?"

"No, sir, but he looked all around the shanty—looked till I thought he would take something off with him."

"You hadn't very much for him to take, eh, Josie?"

"Nothing but Coppers's watch, which I hid in the bed this morning."

Silas now led up to the desire nearest his mind. Would little Josie go off with him and be brought up in better style, live in a better house, where there was more life and not so much sin? Would she let him be her friend, and would she go with him and ask no questions why he did this?

The child's eyes brightened, and her bosom heaved with excitement. It was more than she had expected. It was like unto the opening of the gates of heaven—the unfolding the doors of brightness, and tears stood in her eyes and blinded them till big-hearted Silas Tracer felt his own tears start.

"You are very kind. But you don't want me to forget Coppers, do you?" asked Josie.

"Not unless you wish to, Josie."

"I couldn't forget him if I tried to. He was a man to me and there wasn't about him anything bad, though Mag says the papers gave him a bad name. Must I go now?"

"I am ready to take you at once. You are ready, are you, child?"

"As soon as I bid Mag good-by."

"Where is Mag?"

"Three doors down the alley. You just wait here. I'll slip out the back way and see her privately."

Tracer consented.

He did not want to take Josie away with any debts of gratitude unpaid. Perhaps Rockaway Mag, tough as she might be, had been a friend to the burglar's *protegee*, and it was but right that Josie should bid her good-by on the threshold of a new existence.

Silas Tracer found himself alone in the cramped den which Coppers had inhabited since his last return from prison.

It was a chamber opening into one back of it where Josie slept, and where perhaps, though surrounded by vice, she had dreamed dreams as pure as the visions of the sainted.

A poor lamp, the chimney of which was blackened by smoke, stood on a chest in one corner of the room and the detective sat down to wait for the little girl.

He fell to thinking of the puzzle of Number Nine. There were few moments when it did not occupy his mind, and now in Coppers's home it naturally came back to him, and coupled with it was the second crime of the fated mansion.

Silas Tracer did not hear the opening of the door in the room behind him. Perhaps if he had he would have thought that Josie was coming back very soon, and he would have turned his head to greet her.

Immersed in the deepest thought, he leaned back in the rickety chair and blinked at the smoking lamp.

The door behind him swung open, for once without a sound.

A man stopped like a person startled the moment he caught sight of Silas Tracer.

It was evident that he did not expect to see the detective in that room.

Perhaps he expected to take advantage of Josie's absence, or had stolen into the place to do the burglar's *protegee* an injury.

He was lithe-like and well-formed. As he stood in the doorway and eyed the detective like a wolf, his breast seemed to swell with suppressed passion, and one of his hands slipped to his pocket and drew out something dark.

In another instant the upper part of his face was masked, which at once gave him the appearance of a desperado.

He leaned against the jamb and watched Silas Tracer. Once or twice he swept his body forward to get a nearer look, and a gleam of villainy lit up the eyes that shone behind the band of black velvet.

"It's all one where we encounter them," said this man, speaking through his teeth, which were still unseen, despite the words.

"We have to meet them somewhere, and here is as good a place as any."

He took a step toward Silas Tracer.

It was a movement which Orall Lagone in another hovel, and not very far from this spot, had just made for Phineas Tripp's edification; but there was no mirror for Silas to note the cat-like tread and the low pantherish cunning of the masked man.

Step after step across the floor moved the unseen.

In one of the gloved hands was clutched something which glittered along the dark sleeve of the loosely fitting coat; the hilt was concealed by the circling fingers.

If Josie had come, or if Silas Tracer had looked around he might have seen the shadow of sudden death which menaced him.

But the detective was fated; the hand of a murderer was nearing him and the last trail of his life seemed very near its ending.

All at once the left hand of the crawler went up and for half a second was poised above the ferret's head.

Then it swooped down over his face and the arms caught him under the chin like a lasso, and he was jerked back, exposing his neck and breast, while the arm of the villain prevented him from getting a good look at the face above him.

It was the work of a moment—the swift, terrible dropping of an arm of destruction.

It nerved him to instant action and he threw himself back, and all at once the old chair gave way beneath him, and crash! it went to the floor, pulling down both men, the murderer and his victim.

They fell in a heap on the floor and so near the table that the detective's foot struck one of the legs, overturning the stand and bringing down the smoky lamp in the general wreck.

Fortunately the lamp did not burn, but went out, leaving the room wrapped in total darkness, and with this the hands of the detective, free for a lucky moment, caught the man above him and turned him over, throwing him at the same time against the wall.

Not a word had passed between the two men.

It was now a struggle for life in the dark, with Josie liable to appear upon the scene and add to it by her screams.

Silas Tracer was active and strong. His length of limb and boniness did not interfere with his agility. Indeed, sometimes they rather assisted him in this direction; and now, when he found himself in the clutches of the masked man, they came once more to his rescue.

He caught the throat of the man on top; he suddenly twisted it with all his might, wrenching a cry of horror from his enemy; and then by a movement which could not be anticipated, he sprang to his feet, entirely free.

What had happened? Had he killed the unknown? Had his sudden twist broken

his neck, as he had heard of necks being broken by just such tactics?

The detective stood in the dark, panting like a deer and ready to meet the next move of his antagonist if he had not already finished him.

Several seconds passed and he had heard nothing of the enemy.

He did not move, as the slightest noise might betray his whereabouts to the scoundrel; but he listened as much for sounds of Josie's return as he did for the step of the foe.

All at once a door opened and shut.

It was the one in the back room. Josie was coming back from Rockaway Mag's!

"Whew! dark as pitch in here!" suddenly exclaimed a child's voice, as the door leading into the rear room opened. "Where are you, Mr. Silas?"

The old trail-fox did not answer.

"Have you gone back after all you said?" continued Josie. "I might have thought it, for you are a stranger, and Mag told me to have a care how I trusted you. I'll strike a match, anyhow."

He heard Josie groping in the dark for the match-box which he had seen on the wall.

"Who's taken the matches? Whose hand was that at the match-box?" cried the child. "Why are you here in the dark, Mr. Silas?"

The next moment another and a more startling cry pealed from the child's throat, and she fell against the detective, almost knocking him off his feet, but not staggering him beyond the power of catching the figure which had landed in his arms.

The door opened and shut with a bang. Some one rushed through the back room and slammed the last door in the same way. It was the Unknown, rushing from the burglar's den.

Silas Tracer struck a match, but too late to see his enemy.

He stood in the room with the frightened child clinging to him, and it was upon her white face that the light fell, and her trembling form seemed ready to sink to the floor.

"Who was he?" asked Josie. "And when did he come in?—While I was out?"

Before Silas could reply the girl pointed at something lying almost at his feet and he picked it up.

It was the Unknown's mask.

And near it lay something else which Josie, a little calmer now, picked up and held up in triumph.

This was a glove which Silas recollected having stripped in part from a hand in the dark, and while he looked at it the child suddenly seized his wrist.

"It is just like the gloves the man wore who came in, as I told you awhile ago. Don't you see that it is brown? That man must have come back; but for what?"

Tracer, the detective, did not reply. He looked at the torn glove and then his eyes wandered to the mask; and while he looked, his lips framed a name which little Josie, the burglar's protégée, did not hear.

It was a name he had spoken before and one he was destined to speak again:

"Savalli!"

CHAPTER XV.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

If the masked man was Savalli, the Spaniard, he had narrowly missed killing his enemy.

It was his hand which Josie felt when she reached for the matches, and it was withdrawn only to find her in the dark and hurl her against Silas Tracer.

But for the detective's hands she would have sunk to the floor and perhaps been badly injured; but the ferret had caught her in the nick of time, and the burglar's little friend escaped without broken limbs.

Let us follow the man who rushed from the house in the first gleams of the shadow's match.

He must have felt that he had escaped in time. As he slammed the last door he ran through the cramped back yard of the place and reached the street.

There he stopped a moment, as he looked back as if to mark the exact scene of his adventure, and then bounded on.

He was active and quick. His lithe figure showing itself in the light of the street lamps was seen for a moment ere he ran on and in a minute he was out of sight.

He did not hail a cab as he might have done, for they were numerous on the wider thoroughfare which he struck; but he continued on afoot until he had gone some distance from the spot.

By and by he turned up in front of an unpretentious house into which he let himself, and going up a flight of stairs he entered a room at the time occupied by a good-looking man who greeted him with a familiar smile.

This man reclined in a chair and was smoking when the other one entered.

"You are back soon," said the occupant of the chamber.

"A little sooner than I expected."

"What has taken place? There is a rent in your coat and your collar—"

The man who had struggled with Silas Tracer burst into a laugh.

"He has claws like a tiger," said he. "I had

him for a moment at my mercy; but all at once he reached up and seized my throat. Heavens! how his hands closed on my wind-pipe, and just then I wished for you, colonel."

"What, did you encounter one of the two?" was the question. "Did you try to baffle them?"

"I made an effort to show Silas Tracer, the tall one, that he would do well to look out while on the trail. I tried to do it, I say; but if I had not wriggled out of his clutches, you would have to play a lone hand, colonel."

"You don't want to take many such chances," was the reply. "Why didn't you use the blade?"

"I had it in my hand—had it ready for him; but he is as quick as a cat, and, then, the chair broke. That added to my discomfiture."

"Where did you find him?"

"In Coppers's den."

"What was he doing there?"

"He went down after the girl whom he thinks of adopting, as if he owed her something for sending the burglar to his doom."

"I didn't think he would do that. But Silas Tracer, as I know him, is a man after all."

"And he could continue to be a man if he kept off the trail he is on just now."

The speaker showed his teeth while he laughed and then, settling down in a chair himself, he looked at the one glove he wore and seemed to wonder what had become of its mate.

"You have but one glove, I see?" said the man who sat near him.

"Yes. I must have left the other behind in the melee."

"Was it much of a tussle, Vijal?"

Savalli looked up.

"It was Satan's own time for two minutes," he laughed. "I never tackled such a lion, as you Americans say. He is all muscle."

"He looks it, remarked the Spaniard's companion. "I have seen him often. If it had been the other one—the little Tripp—I fancy you would not have had such a time."

"Oh, I could have picked him up and thrown him against the wall; but you can't handle Silas Tracer in that way."

"Too much muscle, Vijal."

Savalli smoked a little and then placed his cigar on the table.

"I don't think he knew me, for we fought in the dark," he said, looking at the other one who was a good-looking man, some years the Spaniard's senior. "You see I had been in the house before and had seen the child whom Coppers left. When I saw Silas Tracer coming I felt that he was on a mission of some kind and when the girl left the shanty I knew that I would have it alone with the detective. I found him alone, too, sitting in a chair with his back to the door just as I wanted to catch him. Well, it was easy enough to sneak up on him, for he was not expecting any play of the kind, but the moment my left arm came down over his head, he straightened like a released reed and then we went down."

"I see. He was too quick for you—entirely too quick, Vijal."

"I had the blade in my hand and would have used it if he had not been too quick," grinned Savalli. "The next time, colonel."

"You must catch him napping."

"I know that. It is hard to catch a fox asleep the second time; but if we don't catch him thus we will take him wide awake."

For a moment the other man watched Savalli and then leaned toward him with a change of color.

"When are you going to turn your attention to the bird at the Dove-cote?" he asked.

"To the bird Nick has in his cage?" laughed the Spaniard. "Oh, I will attend to her perhaps to-morrow. She must not get away, and I assure you that she will not. Nick has promised to see that no answers to her letters reach her, and when she is in need, I will step in and rake in the prize."

"That should be soon, Vijal. I am getting rather tired of this."

"Oh, you can soon turn up," smiled the man from Barcelona. "You can soon come to the surface as the only survivor of the Crusader. The world will believe it. Jove! colonel, that was a narrow escape. What if you had sailed in that vessel after all?"

"They all went down," said the other man, who, as the reader has doubtless guessed ere this, was Royal Legare. "I had everything fixed, and from the moment my baggage went aboard, the days of the old hulk were numbered."

"Just so. It was well done, and I give you all the credit. Not one escaped, or at least they never found a survivor. What is in the last edition?"

The thin, womanish hand of Vijal Savalli reached across the table and picked up a newspaper which lay at Legare's elbow.

It had not been opened since he bought it, as if something had interfered with his reading.

"I don't know. I haven't looked to see," said Legare. "You may find something in it, Vijal. I'll smoke in silence while you look through the sheet."

Savalli began to run his eye up and down the columns on the first page.

All at once he checked himself, and his gaze seemed to become riveted on a certain spot.

He started; he turned pale, and then as suddenly got his color back, as he looked over at the smooth, cruel face of Royal Legare.

"Here is something for both of us," said he.

"Really for me, Vijal?"

"I should say so. Look for yourself."

"No, give it to me yourself. I'll listen. Anything about the city?"

"It's about the Crusader."

Royal Legare whirled and faced the Spaniard. His face was deathly white, and for a moment his lips seemed to quiver.

"But what about her? It wasn't a hoax, the story of the wreck, I hope!"

"It was true, but one part of the old captain's story has been overthrown."

"What part was that?"

"Another boat has picked up a survivor—the first mate, and the man is now in this city."

Legare sat like a person suddenly nailed to the chair. His hands reached out for the paper, but he drew them back and told Savalli to read the account to him.

In another moment the clear voice of the Spaniard was reading to the motionless man across the table an account of shipwreck and villainy which would have brought anger to any bosom but that of the cool listener.

It was the story of the first mate of the ill-fated Crusader, Olsen Bromann. It detailed the voyage of the bark from the moment of her leaving port to the terrible explosion in mid-ocean.

Everything went to show that the Crusader had been sent to her doom by some fiend who must have smuggled an infernal machine on board. The explosion had occurred when everything was peace and quiet on the ship—when no one looked for anything of the kind. Bromann gave his reasons for believing that such was the case, and they were conclusive.

Royal Legare listened to Savalli with interest. Now and then he changed color, and his hands, which rested on the edge of the table at the beginning of the narrative, fell into his lap, and he saw looking at him the keen eyes of his companion in crime.

"You've left something out," suddenly cried Legare. "Why don't you read the whole account?"

Savalli smiled one of his cunning smiles, and turned to the paper again.

"He hits you, the mate does," said Savalli.

"Hits me?" queried Legare, leaning toward his friend. "What does he say?"

Savalli read:

"Asked about the passengers, Bromann said that he was quite sure that Royal Legare did not sail with them, that he had engaged passage and had had his luggage brought on board; but that he was not one of them when the accident occurred."

"Let me see," and Legare read the paragraph for himself; read it through with welded teeth and with eyes that seemed to start from their sockets.

"It is true. That amounts to a charge, almost!" he cried. "You look at it in that way, don't you, Vijal?"

Savalli nodded.

"If we could have seen the mate first; but that was impossible, for he doubtless told his story first to those who picked him up. But we're safe here. How do they know whether you sailed or not? A mate doesn't know who all are on a ship; but I'll admit that some of them find out a good deal about passengers. He says your luggage came aboard."

"While I did not follow it!" grinned Legare. "That's what he intimates. What if the ferrets take the clue from this garrulous fellow? What if they conclude to look for me in New York?"

"Let them look! It was a fine game, well played. The only break in it is the saving of this rascal, who comes back from the depths to bother us just a little."

Royal Legare said nothing for a full minute.

"Where is he?" he finally asked.

"You will see in the article that he was interviewed at his old boarding-house on Bleeker street."

"You know where that is, Vijal?"

"Yes."

"Keep it in your head. Now about the other one—the bird in Cloman's cage. You say she is to need you ere long?"

"She is. I shall fix that with Nick. She will need help and need it bad in a few hours. The letters she will never get from the business houses will drive her to distraction, and when the claws of poverty begin to close on her, she will be glad to take Savalli at his word and fall into the trap. She says her father left her a little. The old man had secrets which he kept from his daughter. You know that, colonel."

"Yes. He was worth nearly three hundred thousand, and yet to her he played the poor gentleman to a dot."

Both men laughed together; but all at once Royal Legare ceased, as if before him had risen the shadow of impending fate—the staggering figure of a burning hulk in mid-ocean.

Savalli laughed on, and only stopped to look at a dagger which he took from its black sheath with a peculiar movement.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLIGHT FROM THE DOVE-COTE.

MORE trouble and sorrow was in store for Rana Monk, the "bird in Nick Cloman's cage," as Royal Legare called her.

The next day after the events we have just recorded the girl rose to make a startling discovery. The room in which she slept had been robbed and her little store of money had vanished!

It was her only hope and she had harbored it with care, for she wanted the supply to hold out until she could find employment at which she could make a living.

When she sounded the alarm she was told that the thief had not made her the only victim, that, in fact, he had plundered the office, opening Nick's little safe underneath the counter, and taking away its valuable contents consisting of some notes and papers of value.

Overcome for some time by the robbery, Rana sat motionless in her chair, hardly knowing what to do.

She felt more than ever her friendlessness in the heart of the great city. An orphan with no friends to whom she could go in time of need, for a moment she felt like throwing herself on the mercies of the outside world and trust to chance.

While rummaging through the little keepsakes she had come across Vijal Savalli's card.

It seemed to look up at her with a half-fiendish grin, and as she looked she recalled the Spaniard's words.

He had told her that he was ready to befriend her at any time, and that a letter addressed to him in care of the landlord of the Dove-cote would bring him at once to her side.

Rana thought of these things as she gazed at the little card crumpled at the edges and somewhat soiled.

Then she recalled her adventure the night of her visit to the two detectives' den and what they had told her about Savalli.

She could not trust this man and yet she needed help. Her week's board was just due, and she hadn't a dollar in the world. Mrs. Cloman had broadly hinted that she could stay with them as long as she paid promptly, and that when she ceased to do so she knew where the door was.

All that day Rana kept her room. At times she thought of going out and hunting up the two detectives who might befriend her; but she had a certain pride which held her back from casting herself at any one's feet.

It was a dreary day for the penniless and homeless girl.

She saw the shadows of another night swooping down upon the Dove-cote and realized that it might be her last night there.

Already Nick Cloman and his avaricious better half knew that she did not possess a dollar in the world, and all day she looked for the form of Mrs. Cloman to enter her room and tell her what would have to be done.

Suddenly a knock sounded on the door and Rana with a start answered it by opening the portal.

The man who stood on the threshold was Vijal Savalli.

As Rana fell back with a light cry which she could not suppress, the Spaniard stepped inside and quietly halted in the light of her lamp.

He was sleekly dressed and cleanly shaved, and the black mustache had been newly waxed as if he was trying to make an impression on the heart of the robbed girl.

"Another blow has fallen Nick tells me, miss," said Savalli.

Rana did not speak. Her eyes sought the floor for a second, but when she lifted them she found those of the Spaniard looking at her as if he were trying to read her very thoughts.

"I happened to come in awhile ago and Nick told me of the double robbery. They 'touched' him too," and the man laughed a little. "Well, he won't be beggared so far as what he lost is concerned; but they carried off some important papers, several of which belonged he tells me to his other guests."

"So he has told me. Of course I feel my blow the heaviest," and Rana smiled faintly. "The thief did not spare me in the least. He took all he could, which, while not very much in a thief's eye, was a good deal in mine."

"Did he take all your spare cash?"

"Everything."

"Then you will have to fall back on your reserve fund."

Savalli spoke in an off-hand manner as if he took it for granted that the young girl was so favored with fortune that she had a reserve fund to fall back upon.

"Alas," said Rana promptly, "I have no such fund to go to. You seem to forget, Senor Savalli, that father was not well-fixed, so far as worldly goods were concerned, and when the thief walked out of this house last night he took with him my earthly fortune."

"But the letters you wrote several days ago in search of employment?"

Rana started. She thought of the conversation she had overheard after Savalli's former visit, and while she looked at him she wondered if he was really playing a double game, as Tripp and Tracer expected.

"As yet I have not received a single reply," and she thought how she had watched for the letter-carrier who had come regularly to the Dove-cote, but with nothing for her.

"You must know that situations are taken as soon as they are vacant," said Savalli, running his gloved fingers along the needle-like ends of his mustache. "I have found this out during my residence in this city. I fear you cannot look for help from that direction."

"I have given that up," answered Rana. "I must look elsewhere or—"

She paused and without looking up felt that the eyes of the Spaniard were riveted upon her.

"I don't see that you need to give up at all," said Savalli. "A beautiful girl like you will find friends, no matter how situated. Surely you have not such a bad opinion of the world."

"You know, sir, that I am a stranger in this country—that I looked to father for help; but now that he has been taken from me, and I in turn have been plundered by some heartless wretch, I in my terrible dilemma know not which way to turn."

She was conscious at the end of her sentence that she was almost throwing herself into the arms of this cool-headed designing man; but the words were out, and though she regretted them, they could not be withdrawn.

Savalli took a step toward Rana and continued in lower tones:

"I told you, miss, when here the other day, that if ever you needed a friendly hand you would have V. Savalli's at your service. I am here to repeat that declaration and to offer you assistance now. I have felt ever since I heard of your condition that you were not in congenial quarters, and now, if you will trust me, I will be glad to brighten your sky and—"

"I cannot ask that much of you!" cried Rana, interrupting him as the overheard conversation of several days back rushed across her mind.

"You must let me fight fate alone. I will try it. Father would not have been disheartened by a robbery which deprived him of his little all, and his daughter must show his courage."

The eyes of the Spaniard glowed as he watched the fair girl.

"But you do not realize the true situation. This is a great city, miss. It is full of pitfalls and snares for the unwary and the helpless. You cannot expect to remain where you are at present without some funds."

"That is true," and Rana thought of what Mrs. Nick had hinted.

"My friend Cloman is keeping boarding-house for what there is in it for him, and while he would like to befriend you, he cannot afford to keep you long without money."

"He need not keep me long!" spiritedly exclaimed Rana. "I will not trouble Mr. Cloman after to-night."

"But whither will you go, miss?"

"Out yonder!" and her hand pointed to the street. "I will go out into the streets and trust to luck."

"It would be the most disastrous move of your life. It would be suicide."

"Others have succeeded before me."

"One where a thousand went down."

"If I am not the thousandth one, then I will go under, that's all!"

There was something about the murdered man's child that for a moment challenged the plotter's admiration. He could not help looking at the faultless figure in the middle of the floor; the bright eyes were fastened upon him while their owner seemed determined enough to carry out the awful move she had mentioned.

"There's no use of this—none at all," said Savalli. "I am here to take care of you. I am rich enough to make your future life a bed of roses and since the sad accident to your father, you need a friend who will look after you and who will see that the hand of poverty and sorrow ever turns from the path you tread."

There was no mistaking these words as they fell from Savalli's lips.

Rana with heightened color fell back from the man, but stopped as she regarded him from her chair.

"I cannot accept, Senor Savalli. I prefer to fight my own battles."

"A young girl against a heartless world?" exclaimed the Spaniard, with a derisive laugh. "It must not be. Don't be suicidal, Miss Rana."

"If it be so to refuse your proffers of help, then that is what it shall be!"

The advancing man stopped like a person suddenly checked by the muzzle of a pistol. He looked—almost glared—at the girl and seemed for a moment at a complete loss how to meet her last words.

"You will be driven from this house, for Nick loves money—"

"As I have said, he will never drive me out. I will go now."

Vijal Savalli, with all his forethought and coolness, was thunderstruck.

"He won't drive you out to-night, perhaps. Here, you shall not be penniless, no matter how you receive my offers of aid."

He drew his note-book, but Rana waved back his hand.

"No. I will not be placed under obligations to you, Senor Savalli," she cried. "I will go out into the world as I entered it in England—penniless; but this time I will have a will which shall help me or fail."

He threw a bank-note on the table; but all at once Rana sprang forward, caught it up and flung it upon the grate.

She may have regretted her startling act the moment it was done; but Savalli, looking at her with eyes that appeared green with rage, turned and swept toward the door.

"You may have thrown away the last chance," he said, looking back at Rana Monk. "If Vijal Savalli withdraws his hands your descent of the ladder of poverty may be as swift as a thunderbolt."

"So be it!" was what he heard ere he closed the door, to go down and find Nick Cloman grinningly waiting for him in the office.

"Well, you seem to have roused a tigress," said the landlord of the Dove-cote.

"I should say so. She has her father's blood and her mother's beauty. But wait!"

"Did she accept your offers?"

"No, and she threw my money into the fire."

Nick Cloman uttered an oath.

"Well, what do you propose to do next?"

"She must take the first step down the ladder to-night. She must feel an iron hand. That will fetch her round, if anything will. You won't hesitate to turn her out, eh, Nick?"

"Just as you say," answered the rascal of the place.

"All right. Give her a little time to reflect. Maybe she will come to her mutton; but it's not likely she will until the thumbscrews have tightened a little. Give her half an hour and then go to work."

"And you?"

"Oh, I won't be far off," laughed Savalli.

The Spaniard walked from the place and Nick Cloman called his wife.

"She wouldn't play into Savalli's hand," said he. "She showed some of her father's blood, and even went so far as to throw his money into the fire, and that when she hasn't a dollar in the world."

"Why didn't he bring her to time?" cried the woman, as her eyes flashed. "I wish I had stood in Savalli's shoes. She would have come round, or I would have known why she didn't."

"Yes, yes. I know what you would have done, Dolly. But this is the programme: We give her half an hour of grace. At the end of that time you will go up and get her decision. If she is willing to take help from Savalli, she stays; if not, out she goes, forthwith!"

"I wouldn't give her that much grace," growled the heartless vixen as she retired.

Nick Cloman went back to his affairs, but often as the minutes waned he glanced at the clock that ticked above his head.

"Time up!" he said, knocking on his wife's door.

"Here I am," and the burly figure of the she-hawk in the Dove-cote made its appearance and Nick saw his wife ascend the stairs.

Presently her voice was heard calling to him in startled tones.

He ran up the flight, two steps at a time.

"She's given us the slip!" cried Mrs. Cloman white with rage as her hand with a hasty gesture swept Rana's chamber. "You see the nest is empty. I said you were giving her too much time."

Nick stared at the empty chairs and the untouched bed.

He crossed the room and threw up the lid of Rana's trunk which he found unlocked.

The child of Marcus Monk was gone.

"Hold on!" cried Nick. "Savalli said ere he went off that he would keep in the neighborhood. Perhaps he was expecting this and the girl may have run into his arms."

Mrs. Cloman shook her head.

"If slick enough to give us the slip," she said, "she will be slick enough to escape Savalli. The whole game has been botched just as a man might be expected to botch it!" and she marched from the room, leaving her husband to curse the turn events had taken.

CHAPTER XVII.

"GO AND HANG HIM, SILAS."

A STORY like that told by Mate Bromann of the Crusader and spread broadcast by means of the newspapers, was certain to reach Phineas Tripp and Silas Tracer.

It did so as soon as it reached Royal Legare in his hiding-place, and the two detectives read it with interest and then looked at one another for a moment of silence.

"Will you see this man?" quietly asked Phineas Tripp.

"If you say so, Phineas."

"See him at once and ask him, among other things, this question: What sort of luggage Royal Legare brought or sent aboard the vessel."

A minute later Silas Tracer was on the street with his face turned toward the place where the only survivor of the *Crusader* was to be found.

He gained the street and found the house a common boarding-place, cheap and not very clean, but good enough for a man not overly nice, as was the mate of the *Crusader*.

Tracer found Olsen Bromann in a small room near the head of a long flight of steps and introduced himself. The last survivor of the bark was a short, thick-set fellow, with a profusion of beard, deep-set eyes, broad shoulders and a lurking smile.

He received the detective with no suspicion of his true calling, for he reached out and handed Tracer a strong pipe which the ferret declined with thanks which hardly concealed his disgust.

Silas Tracer plunged at once into his errand and Bromann helped him along after a manner peculiarly his own.

Silas came shortly to the question he was deputized to ask:

At the words Bromann started and then smiled:

"You think so, too, do you?" he said. "Don't you know that some of these smart young newspaper men laugh at the idea that the *Crusader* went up under a machine? What sort of luggage did Royal Legare fetch on board?"

"Oh, he brought it himself, did he?"
"Yes, sir; I helped him on with it. Well it was a common looking valise big enough to carry a good deal of clothes and I wondered what on earth he wanted with so many duds in Cuba. It was, as I have said, a stout valise and I remember when I picked it up and started toward his state-room with it, he told me to be careful and I asked him if clothes ever broke by the dropping of a valise."

"You carried it to his state-room did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Royal Legare?"

"He stopped a moment to talk with Captain Shelley and then came after me."

"How long did he remain in the state-room?"

Olsen Bromann ran his rough hand through his beard.

"That's the only thing I'm short on," said he. "I didn't see him go back, but I know that he wasn't on board the next day."

"You're not short on that point, eh?"

"Not at all. I have a grip on it sure. I went down to his state-room the next morning and he wasn't there, and the bunk hadn't been tumbled at all, sir."

"Did you tell the captain?"

"No, sir, I didn't because he was slightly in liquor and I knew when to approach him. I didn't say a word about Royal Legare's not being on the vessel; but I knew he wasn't."

"It looks that way from what you say, Mr. Bromann; but what makes you think the *Crusader* was destroyed by an infernal machine?"

"It's as plain as daylight to me. I'll tell you. The thing occurred at night. It might have been twelve o'clock, or it might have been one; I can't say the exact hour. I was passing Royal Legare's door when I heard a strange whirring noise and I stopped. I put my ear to the door and heard it again. It was like a whirr of little wheels in rapid motion, a sort of clock-work broke loose, as it were. You see I listened till I thought of entering the room to see what was the matter, but just then I was called and I went up on deck."

"It was as bright a moonlight night as ever I saw in the tropics. One could see for miles, as it seemed, across the water, and we were moving along under a good breeze which, if kept up, would help us visibly before morning. I must have been on deck about twenty minutes, all the time thinking about those wheels in Royal Legare's state-room and when I got off I started back determined to enter the room and see what it all meant. Well, sir, I hadn't got more than half-way down the ladder when the whole ship seemed to be lifted from the sea and turned topsy-turvy. It came like a thunderbolt and as I was near that state-room—we had but three in the ship—the whole shock seemed to come from there. The next moment we were a lot of helpless beings in mid-ocean and the shell of the *Crusader* was on fire. I found myself thinking even then of the little wheels which I had heard in Legare's room; and when I put out my hand and clutched the piece of the fore-castle which had saved me, I rasped my hand on something."

Olsen Bromann smiled as he ran one hand into the depths of his pants and fished up something which he had concealed there.

"What do you think it was?" he asked, leaning toward Silas Tracer. "I had to laugh when I pulled it out of the wood in which it had imbedded itself, for it confirmed my suspicions. Now, I will swear that when we left New York we hadn't such a thing in the vessel unless it was in Royal Legare's state-room. This is what I found sticking in the wood of the floating thing," and he laid on the table before the detective one-half of a brass wheel, having many small cogs and notches.

Silas Tracer picked it up and examined it in the light.

"You found this on the part of the fore-castle

to which you were hurled by the explosion, did you, Bromann?"

"I found it nowhere else."

"It's part of a brass wheel and it has been used."

"I've seen that already," was the reply.

"Yes, sir, that wheel did a part of the dreadful work; I'd almost swear to it."

"Did you show it to the reporters?"

"I started in to do so, but the first one laughed at me and that put an end to the exhibition."

Silas continued to examine the object while Bromann rattled on, for he was garrulous, though he told his story with a certain sang-froid which put the seal of truth upon it.

"While I never expected to get away alive, I slipped that thing in my pocket, for it was a startling memento of my last voyage, and more than once while I drifted about the next day until picked up by the *Jennie King*, I looked at it with feelings which I can't describe. Why, sir, hang me, if I haven't heard the whirr of those unseen wheels in my dreams and more than once they have roused me. It's queer, I know, and perhaps it's no wonder the reporters laughed at me; but, sir, I can't help it. That thing you hold in your hand helped to send my comrades to Davy Jones's locker and it will cost the insurance companies more than it cost its maker."

"Do you want it?" asked Silas Tracer.

"Why, of course I do. I wouldn't part with it unless it be long enough to hang somebody. Who are you, anyhow?"

"I am Silas Tracer, detective."

"Now, are you?" and Bromann fell back and stared at the ferret. "What are you after? Are you for the insurance men?"

"No, sir, I'm for justice."

"That sounds better. And you want that wheel?"

"Not to keep, Bromann. I will return it tomorrow."

"Take it," said the man. "A detective, eh? What set you on this trail?"

"The arrival of yourself in New York."

"And you have suspected that Royal Legare didn't sail in the *Crusader*?"

"I know he didn't."

Olsen Bromann uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"Then, I have somebody with me!" cried he.

"You know he didn't go with us? That's good. Let me tell you, Mr. Detective; Royal Legare didn't tell me not to drop the valise for nothing. Perhaps if I hadn't been called on deck while listening to the wheels in the state-room, we might not be looking into one another's face, and the *Crusader* wouldn't be at the bottom of the sea in pieces, for, as I live, I would have thrown that infernal luggage overboard if the captain hanged me to the yard the next hour."

Ten minutes later Silas Tracer was on the street.

He went direct to a hotel and turned to a Directory lying on the desk.

He looked under the head of "Machinists," and ran his fingers down through the names.

It seemed like a hunt for a needle in a haystack, but the ferret stopped at last.

With several penciled notes, something he seldom carried, for he trusted to his wonderful gift of memory, he plunged into the night and pulled up at a door on the second floor of an odd-looking house.

His knock admitted him, and the moment he caught sight of the little man who wore an apron and whose hair was tangled as if it had not seen a comb from boyhood, he sprang forward and called him by name.

"Well, Peter, you've almost escaped me."

"Silas Tracer, by my soul! Hush! don't talk quite so loud; the old lady is sick in the room yonder. You never saw her, for I married like a fool after coming to New York. Haven't seen you for twenty years. Come into the work-shop."

The machinist led the way to an adjoining room, the door of which when opened revealed a room filled with a machinist's lathes and tools, Peter, and seating himself on a three-legged stool, folded his half-naked arms and looked at Silas.

"You don't seem to work much, Silas?" he said.

"Perhaps not."

"Good clothes and trim, and so on. But you always was that way, you know. Had the best duds of any boy in the neighborhood, but always appeared to be looking into the mysterious. We said you would be a policeman one of these days; but I guess you've picked up another calling, as I don't see your shield."

Silas laughed and glanced round the shop.

"What do you make here, Peter?"

"You see, Silas—pretty near everything. It's poor business, but sometimes I get a job that pays."

The detective picked up a little wheel that lay on the work-bench and bent toward the light.

"I make them things by hand, while in other places they do it by machinery," said Peter.

"But I make them strong, and for those who can pay well."

"Do you make many, Peter?"

"Not a million," grinned the old man, show-

ing his teeth. "I can't make many in a day, you see—not with my tools. This last job I had paid, though."

"Financially?"

"Yes."

"What sort of job was it, Peter?"

The machinist caught Silas Tracer's arm, and bending forward, looked up into his face.

"Do you have to know, old boy?" he asked.

"You are just like you used to be, always inquiring into other people's business, ha, ha."

"I'd like to know, Peter," said Tracer, seriously.

"Well, I don't know much about my patron; indeed, I never find out about any of them. But this man treated me so clever, that I easily recall him."

"Go on."

"He got me to make him a lot of little wheels of different sizes. Heaven knows how he found me out, but by the City Directory, I guess; that's what Lizzie says, anyhow. Well, I made the wheels and fitted them in measure for him, though he seemed to divine that I didn't know what he wanted with them; and when he went off, I was fifty dollars richer than when I began."

"That was lucky, Peter."

"I should say so."

"I suppose you don't remember what your wheels looked like?"

"Show me one and let me tell you."

Silas Tracer's hand dropped into his pocket, and he fished up Olsen Bromann's broken wheel.

At sight of it, and even before he laid it on the work-bench, Peter Wray uttered a cry of recognition.

"Where did you get that?" he cried. "That is the half of one of the wheels I made for the fifty-dollar gentleman."

"Are you sure of it, Peter?"

"Take me to court and hear me swear to it," and the speaker solemnly lifted his hand.

"You have a tenacious memory, Peter. It must be one of those wheels. Now, what about the man you made them for?"

"I don't know his name, and as he came for the work himself, he never left his address. But I know what he looked like, if that will do your inquisitive soul any good," and Peter Wray proceeded to give a word photograph of his liberal patron.

It was not a pen portrait of Royal Legare, but here and there Silas Tracer seemed to pick up interest, and when Peter concluded he thanked him.

"What's up, Silas?" asked Peter.

"Nothing much."

"But what makes you so anxious to hear all about the man and the making of that wheel?"

Tracer eyed the machinist a moment and then drew a slip of newspaper from his pocket. It was Mate Bromann's story about the loss of the *Crusader*, and there was the slight allusion to an infernal machine and the whirr of strange wheels in a certain state-room a few minutes before the explosion.

Peter Wray looked up with a white face and fixed his eyes on Silas Tracer.

"I see, I see! I know why you have questioned me. You must be interested in the loss of that ship. What are you, Silas—a man-hunter?"

"They call me so, Peter."

"My God! I made the infernal machine for the wretch who sunk the *Crusader*! Go out and hang him. Go! go!" and the detective was pushed madly toward the door.

"By heavens! I will," and Silas Tracer was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PHINEAS TRIPP'S SAGACITY.

WHAT did it all mean? Where was the connecting link?

If Royal Legare was the man whose villainy and ingenuity had sunk the *Crusader* what had he done it for?

Phineas Tripp looked at the little wheel which Silas brought back to the den and put on his thinking cap.

It was not much of a tangle for the little man who thought out the red puzzles of crime.

"Royal Legare wanted to be counted out of the city while Marcus Monk was being murdered in Number Nine," said he, looking up and catching Silas Tracer's eye. "But why should he destroy the vessel and thus make people believe that he was at the bottom of the sea? That would put him under an *alias* and consign him as Royal Legare to oblivion."

Tracer nodded.

"Don't you recollect, Silas, that Miss Monk told you that the paper which contained the advertisement which her father answered was sent up to her so folded that—you saw it yourself, I believe—Marcus Monk noticed the offer at a glance? That was the first step of the conspirators. They had to interest Marcus Monk in the mansion on the avenue. Now, look here. Royal Legare engages passage in the *Crusader*. To all intents and purposes he is out of the way when the crime is committed, for the vessel left port hours before Marcus Monk was killed."

"That seems to dispose of the argument that Royal Legare might have been in the city at the time. As we know, he was here, for even while the people were reading of the loss of the Crusader, Rana Monk, hastening to us with the note written by Savalli and left with Nick Cloman, encounters two men on the street, one of them Savalli himself, and the other, though disguised, undoubtedly Royal Legare."

"That's good, Phineas."

"The attempt to fasten the crime on Garish Legare, the young chloral fiend, and Royal's adopted son, is another step of the conspirators. It was a shrewd step, for the youth was half crazed with losses at play that night and to this day cannot tell all that happened to him. His best dagger was missing, the one old Cortelono sold him. You saw it sticking in Marcus Monk's bosom. Then, there was blood on the steps leading to the young man's room and blood-smears on the carpet there. Why, if the young fellow had tumbled into the hands of the police, he would have been convicted in spite of us perhaps."

"Yes, Phineas."

"Now!" and the little detective leaned across the table, his dark eyes snapping as they regarded Silas Tracer. "What next do we find? Rana is offered the friendship of Savalli, the man who owns a Karan and who taught Royal Legare and Orall Lagone the Savalli stroke. Why does he do this? What is his motive? To get possession of Rana Monk? Yes, but not for the purposes the world suspect. There's money somewhere, Silas—big money; and it must be coming somewhere along the line to Rana Monk."

"She says her father was hardly comfortably fixed."

"True. Men have secrets. This Marcus Monk was secretive. I noticed that while I looked at him after death. You don't know much about his past. He came from England and a part of his life was passed in making it hot for Royal Legare who destroyed his home and really caused the death of his wife, Rana's mother. Orall Lagone, the rascal's partner in crime, tells us this much. I was looking round a little while you were interviewing the sailor and your old friend, Peter Wray."

Tracer, who knew Tripp's moods, said nothing, but watched his pigmy partner."

"Marcus Monk was rich."

"You've found that out, eh?"

"Yes. He was so secretive that he dared not trust himself to take care of certain papers which he owned. I examined his note-book which was found on his body after death and while it was confusion, and so written that it was almost an enigma to any one but the writer, I thought I discovered something tangible. I have just come from the home of a man who shared Marcus Monk's confidence more than even his daughter did."

Phineas Tripp laid a piece of paper on the table and glanced at it ere he proceeded.

"He left fifty thousand dollars in the hands of the man I have discovered," continued Tripp. "He left fifty thousand pounds in the Bank of England. They killed him for that."

It was a positive assertion, as was nearly every one made by Phineas Tripp; and he raised his head till it was nearly on a level with Tracer's face.

"Don't you see that if Savalli marries Rana Monk he will get his hands on the old man's money, which he cannot well do otherwise? His offers of help mean that and nothing more. He intends to drive the girl to want and—"

At this moment a footstep came to the detectives' door and they looked in that direction.

"Open! open!" cried a voice which took the agile form of Tracer across the room.

As he opened it a girlish figure rushed into the light and Phineas Tripp said with a smile:

"I told you so, Silas!"

The creature who had rushed so unexpectedly into the room was Rana Monk and as she sunk into a chair, out of breath, she looked wildly around the den, and catching sight of the two ferrets seemed to realize that she was safe at last.

Tracer had shut the door and slipped a bolt into its socket.

"What is it, miss?"

Rana, calmer now, told her story. She went back and detailed her last interview with Vijal Savalli, and her subsequent escape from the Dove-cote in time to outwit the conspirators.

"Where have you been since quitting the Dove-cote?" asked Tripp.

"That is another part of my story," said Rana. "I was bewildered by the lights and confused by the startling events of which I seemed a part. I cannot tell you how I reached a strange part of the city nor how I ran across a young woman who at first seemed to me an angel of joy, but who afterward brought back to me the terrible crime which cost my father his life."

"Do you mean Miss Lockwood, the maid?" asked Phineas Tripp.

"How did you know?" exclaimed Rana.

"Yes, sir, I met that woman. She must have known me for she caught my sleeve and before I knew it I was in her room. I saw her but

once and that was the day before father was buried, when some one told me that she was the woman who discovered him dead in Number Nine. She seemed to charge me with her own misery, for she said that if we had not crossed the sea she might be happy now. By and by, however, she changed for the better and I was becoming fond of her, when another event took place. You may know where Miss Lockwood lives, I do not, for this city is a maze of streets to me, reminding me of London. While we were talking a door opened and there came into the room a young man who stopped the moment he saw me. Miss Lockwood sprung up and tried to shield me, but he pushed her aside and I knew that I was looking at Garish Legare, the young man mixed up with the tragedy of that awful night.

"It was almost pitiful to see Miss Lockwood try to get him out of the room. But he insisted on seeing me, and while I shuddered in his presence because of the terrible notoriety he had obtained, I was forced to listen. He asked my forgiveness, and while Miss Lockwood begged him to say nothing, he as good as confessed that it was his hand which killed father."

The two detectives looked at one another as Rana Monk took breath.

"That decided me. I could not remain in the house which sheltered such people, though Miss Lockwood was very kind to me, so I slipped through her lines of vigilance and am here."

"But you were frightened on the street?" quietly said Phineas Tripp.

"That is true. I found my way to the block—I hardly know how—but as I turned a corner I saw Vijal Savalli."

"On the street, miss?"

"Down on yonder corner, I think," and Rana went to the window and pointed toward the lighted streets.

"That is why I ran," she went on. "The eyes of that man are before me all the time, and the moment I saw those down there I knew that the human tiger in kids was at my heels."

The young girl drank a glass of water and as she replaced the glass, Tripp asked:

"Did you ever hear your father speak of a friend named Dustan—Oliver Dustan?"

"Once or twice."

"Did he ever convey the impression that he lived in this city?"

"I cannot say that he did. It seems to me, however, that a Mr. Dustan used to visit at our house near Piccadilly Circus."

Phineas Tripp glanced toward his partner as if to say, "that is man," and then he turned to Rana again.

"Did your father ever have any deposits in the Bank of England?"

The girl's eyes opened in amazement.

"In the Bank of England?" she echoed.

"What, we have deposits there?"

"Then, he never mentioned such deposits to you, miss?"

"Never. You see we never got that far on the road to riches. Father once had some shares in an Australian gold-mine, but I believe he got shut of them at a sacrifice. No deposits in the Bank of England—none in any bank save the Bank of Sorrow and Distress."

Tripp seemed at his wits' end for a moment and then brightening up, he went on:

"So you threw Vijal Savalli's money in the fire, did you?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps it was not just the thing to do, but I was enraged at the man's offers."

"Did you notice the bill, miss?"

"No more than to see that it was a twenty dollar note."

"New or old, miss?"

"Crisp and new."

"Just from the press, eh?" mused Tripp.

"And you were afterward visited by Nick Cloman?"

"No, he did not come up that time. I overheard the two men in the office, and knew that I was in a trap which was guarded by both of them. But, if you will let me ask you a question, what makes you ask me about those Bank of England deposits?"

"I ask from a desire to get to the bottom of one or two mysteries."

"Nothing more, miss," put in Tracer.

Rana, though mystified still, looked pleased, and turned to the diminutive Tripp, at whom she gazed for a moment.

"Before I left the Dove-cote, as you call it, I looked through father's trunk and brought away a little packet which I have kept unopened."

She drew from beneath her shawl, as she concluded, a small package, which she placed on the table. The two detectives bent forward, and Phineas Tripp's hands alighted upon it.

"This is it, miss," said he.

Rana fell back in her chair and stared at him. "This is the cause of it all, my head on the wager!" continued Tripp.

He cut the thongs of the packet with his knife, opened it in the orphan's presence, and tumbled out a folded paper.

"Look!" he said, as he opened this in turn. "Your father's certificates of deposits in the Bank of England!"

Rana Monk uttered a startling cry.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED BOMBSHELL.

ROYAL LEGARE was ill at ease.

The story brought to the city by the rescued mate of the Crusader was quite enough to startle him and render him suspicious and watchful.

Savalli, on the other hand, seemed cool and calculating, and when he looked into the eyes of this man he wondered what the next few hours would bring forth!

Legare was sitting near the table of the retreat to which he had fled after his supposed embarkation, and was watching the door, for a footstep had come up the stairs and seemed to have halted in the hall.

Opening the nearest drawer in the desk at his right, the man took out a revolver, which he held in his lap, hidden by the table.

Presently the door was struck by nervous fingers, and he crossed the room, for it was locked, a precaution he always exercised when Savalli was out.

"Who's there?" asked Royal Legare.

"Some one whom you may want to see," was the answer.

Should he open the door? He hesitated as he weighed everything, and then slowly turned the key in the lock, opening the door half an inch, just like a bunted man, and looked out.

A man stood in the hallway, and it was too dark for Royal Legare to see his features.

As this personage stepped into the room, the man inside fell back and retreated to his chair, staring at his visitor, as well he might.

His visitor was Garish Legare!

The young man came forward with his eyes fixed on his guardian and while Legare cowered in the chair he watched him with a sinister smile.

"I thought so," said Garish. "When I caught sight of your face accidentally at the window yesterday, something went through me like a knife and that's why I'm here."

For another moment there was no response and then Royal Legare seemed to get bold.

"Don't you know, young man," said he, "that you are running into danger in coming here?"

"Oh, I'm just a little desperate," was the reply accompanied by a laugh. "I've been hunted long enough to render me so, and then, I don't care very much how things go."

"Why don't you run off, or do the other thing?"

"Give myself up, eh?"

"Yes. They will close in on you if you persist in remaining in the city. That's pretty certain, for they have your description and the detectives more than suspect you."

"I know all this. I know that I am hunted by the police and the detectives and for the murder of a man whom, as I live! I never touched in anger."

Royal Legare looked away a moment, but came back to the pale face of Garish, the adopted.

"What do you want here?" he asked.

"I want my vindication."

"Just as if I could give it to you, eh?"

"You can give it."

"Young man, you are still the slave of the drug which has not only destroyed your nerves, but which has stained your hands with crime, perhaps involuntary; but with crime, nevertheless."

Garish seemed to fall from the speaker with a shudder.

"You don't mean that?" he cried.

"I'm sorry that I do. I hate to say such words, but look at the situation for yourself. The dagger, I am told, was found in your room. You don't deny that you had such a one in your cabinet?"

"I can't deny that."

"There was blood on the carpet and on the steps leading to your room from the fatal chamber. Then you went back to the Casino with a roll of money. Where did you get it? You didn't find it on the street, eh?"

There was no reply. Garish Legare was watching the speaker with eyes that seemed to burn their way to his heart.

"You were the only one in the house that night besides Miss Lockwood and the would-be tenant," continued Legare. "You don't want to intimate that the girl did it?"

"My God! no!" cried Garish. "What would she kill an old man and a stranger for?"

"That's it. That's just what the police would ask themselves if the girl should be accused. You may say that you were so befuddled that night that you don't know what you were doing; but do you think that that would clear your skirts before a court of justice? Why, I am sorry to say, that already you are condemned, and that by the blood-smears on the carpet and the dagger-sheath which I am told was actually found at the foot of your bed."

"You are determined to convict me, for what purpose God only knows."

"There is no determination about it, boy," said Legare, his voice seeming to soften as he went on. "You know that I have been kind to you—as kind as I would have been to a real son, if Heaven had given me one."

"But your sudden pretended flight to Cuba?" Legare started a little, but a smile soon wreathed his half-hidden lips.

"There's a little secret about that move which I believe I should impart to you. I am pressed—pressed by a creditor which I had hoped was in his grave; but creditors seldom die, and I know that they never forget. Well, as I don't regard the debt as a just one, I concluded to outwit the fellow, hence my supposed trip to Cuba. I did not take passage on the Crusader, or I would be at the bottom of the sea instead of here. It was a lucky escape after all."

"But you have heard of the finding of the first mate?"

"I have just read it," and Legare glanced at the paper on the table.

"Don't you see that by not going to Cuba you have got into trouble yourself? There is a broad hint about an infernal machine on the Crusader, and what if the mate's story should create a search for you?"

"I would not be found unless you turned traitor and gave me away."

Garish looked at the man in the chair, and for a moment seemed to pity him.

"Where is the devil in tan who is your companion?" he suddenly asked.

"What's that? You think I have a friend with me, do you?"

"You have. I don't like to dispute your word, but you have with you off and on Vijal Savalli, the man who used to come to our house at odd hours and remain with you in the library."

"When did you see him here?"

"I can't say that I have seen him in this house, for, as I have told you, I did not know you were here till yesterday. But I saw Vijal Savalli on the street near this house, and that's proof enough for me that the viper is still stinging you to death."

"Well," suddenly cried Royal Legare, feeling the butt of the revolver in his lap, "what are you going to do? I want to know that?"

His manner had changed and he was desperately menacing now.

"In the first place, I want to vindicate my honor."

Legare broke out in a cruel laugh.

"Go out and do it then! I'm sure you won't find me in your way."

His words were a taunt and it went to the young man's heart.

"That means that you don't care how soon they convict me for a crime I never committed. You don't speak in riddles to-night."

"Don't I? Well, that is not the way I care to speak, and I'm glad you understand me so readily. Go out, I say, and clear your skirts of suspicion. The police will welcome you no doubt and the ferrets of the streets will be glad to see you."

Garish Legare groaned.

But at the same time he took a step nearer and his hands shut madly.

"I may face this thing within the next few hours, for, as it is now, every minute is absolute torture. To be hunted by the police—to be charged with killing an old man whom one never saw till the night of his death—"

"Hal! you saw him, then?" interrupted Royal Legare.

"I saw him. I went down to the room that night. I recall this much with distinctness; but, as I stand before heaven! I had no dagger in my hand, and I left him unharmed so far as my will was concerned."

"But the money—the notes which you took back to the Casino?"

"I can't tell you where I got them."

"The detectives may be able to answer that for you by and by," said Legare.

Garish looked toward the door which just then opened and there stood in the flash of the drop-light the sinewy figure of Vijal Savalli.

The man from Barcelona came forward with the look of the sleek tiger which continually cropped out in his nature, and when he saw who Legare's visitor was he threw a swift look toward Royal and grinned.

"You know the young man, Vijal?" said Legare looking at Savalli.

"I know him," was the answer. "He is Garish, your adopted son. What, has he concluded not to hide any longer? Is he going to surrender and tell the story about the dagger-sheath and the gouts of red?"

Garish Legare started toward the Spaniard with his hands open; but recollecting something, he stopped and then fell back.

"I shall not surrender—not now at least!" he cried.

"Ah, you want them to find you do you?" cried Savalli. "Don't you know that you may have been shadowed to this house? Where have you been hiding all this time?"

"Where I am safe! I have hid because I have been biding my time. The man in yonder chair is not, as the city supposes, at the bottom of the sea. He says he wanted to get rid of a troublesome creditor. Do you believe that, Vijal Savalli?"

Royal Legare twisted in his chair.

"Do you doubt my word?" he roared.

"I doubt your word, and I am here to say

that you never thought of the creditor until it served your purpose to create such a person."

Royal Legare flushed and sprung to his feet.

Garish faced the man with the coolness of a desperado now, and his hand suddenly covered his guardian.

"What meant the decreasing sums which of late you have given me? What meant the withdrawal from the bank of nearly every dollar which was my portion? You know that when you pretended to sail to Cuba, you took from my share—that when I went to get some money, I was turned off with the remainder, a pittance—not enough to last me three days."

"I was cutting off your chloral fund and tampering with your gaming resources—all for your good, young man."

"Indeed?" and Garish Legare laughed derisively. "You did this for my good, yet you tell me, also for my good, that the police will certainly convict me of the murder of Marcus Monk, unless I put a sea between me and the ferrets and blue-coats of New York."

"That is true."

The hand of Savalli fell upon Garish Legare's arm.

The youth shook it off and turned upon the man from Barcelona with a white face.

"Don't touch me!" he cried, throwing up his arm. "Don't touch me, I say!"

Savalli dropped his arm and slunk back a step.

"I believe that by your accursed moves I find myself in a net which threatens my neck. I believe that the gouts of blood which Silas Tracer saw leading to my chamber, and the dagger-sheath which his keen eyes discovered at the foot of my bed, were placed there for the purpose of hemming me in. I don't say who did this bit of diabolism; I don't accuse any one person; but I say in the sight of Heaven! that I have been made the assassin's victim; and that I am to stretch hemp to save another's neck—that is, if all plans turn out satisfactorily for the hidden hand."

Vijal Savalli came forward, showing his teeth underneath the waxed mustache; but with a bound which he did not anticipate, Garish Legare went at him, seized him by the throat, and before Legare could interfere, had pinned him against the opposite wall.

It was like the fall of a new thunderbolt.

"I could crush you here and leave your dead body on the floor!" hissed Garish, his eyes almost touching the white cheek of the man from Barcelona. "But I won't. No, I'll let the rope do that. I'll let the public hangman shorten a life which has already lasted too long for the public good. Stand clear of me, both of you!" and releasing Savalli, who gasped along the wall, he turned and walked from the room, shutting the door behind him with a bang.

"I'll twist his neck for that!" muttered Vijal Savalli.

CHAPTER XX.

CORRALED BY PHINEAS TRIPP.

RANA MONK'S escape from the Dove-cote gave one of our characters a good deal of trouble.

This was the proprietor himself, Mr. Nicholas Cloman, and when he made the discovery that his guest was gone, he went down into the bar-room and indulged considerably in the ardent before he started out on the trail.

He would not have found Rana anyhow, for we have heard her tell Tripp and Tracer that fate had thrown her into the hands of Miss Lyra Lockwood, the maid of Number Nine, and Garish Legare's firm friend and sweetheart.

Rana did not know that while flying from the Dove-cote she had narrowly missed falling into Savalli's hands, for the Spaniard was on the watch, hoping that his plans would carry out all right, and that the Clomans would turn the poor girl out upon the streets.

Nick Cloman came home the night after the escape, and let himself into the Dove-cote.

As he turned to the desk he picked up a letter which was directed to himself and looked at the superscription before he broke the seal.

It bore the city post-mark, and curious to know who was writing to him, he opened the letter and read:

"This is written by one who would like to see you on special business, and if you will call at my house to-night, any time between six and ten, I will be there to state the business in hand."

"BUSINESS."

Nick took the letter, which was dated that very day, to his wife, who read it.

"I'd go," said the woman. "It may be something about the girl, and you know we would like to run across her, for there is money in the case."

"I'll go," answered Nick, and in a few moments he had taken a drink of his vile stuff and was on the street.

It took him half an hour to reach the number designated at the foot of the brief note, and when he had knocked and saw the door open, for a moment he wished himself back in the Dove-cote.

He was ushered into a room at the right of the hall, and found himself in the presence of a man who sat at a table writing, with his head close to the board.

"So you've come, Mr. Cloman?" said this party, looking up and for a moment surveying as much of the landlord's body as was to be seen by his light.

"I'm here."

"That's good. Let me see. It's barely seven."

"It lacks five minutes of the time."

All this time the landlord was looking at the small figure in the chair at the table, and was trying to think where he had seen it before.

"I would like to talk to you on a little business which is somewhat old just now, but which we may rehabilitate before we are through with it. You used to have a friend who traveled a great deal, Mr. Cloman?"

"I've had a good many friends in my time. Some of them may have seen something of the world. I don't know about that."

"Of course. It's hard to keep a run of all one's friends, but the one I refer to—You may not have seen him for some time. Do you remember Oliver Dustan?"

Nick started slightly and looked across the table at the speaker.

"You don't mean to go back to the days of one's childhood, I hope?" he said with a smile.

"You recollect him, then?"

"I used to know a man named Oliver Dustan."

"Of course. What ever became of him?"

"I don't know, sir!"

"Didn't he spend a winter in England some years ago?"

"I can't tell you about that."

The little man moved in his chair and turned his face boldly toward the landlord.

"If I am going back too far, Mr. Cloman, I will come down to later dates. Perhaps that will suit you better."

The proprietor of the Dove-cote leaned forward and one of his hands dropped upon the edge of the table.

"I would like to know, sir, if I have been sent for to be questioned in this foolish manner?"

His manner was brusque and almost insulting; but if the little man noticed it, he did not seem to care in the least.

"That's a very proper question, Mr. Cloman," he said. "A very proper one, indeed. I expected it some time ago. Now, sir, let me ask you another question. What was your number at Sing Sing?"

A bomb falling from the ceiling into Nick Cloman's lap would not have startled him more than this question did.

He bounded up—he had dropped into a chair but half a minute previous—and falling back, glared at the other with eyes that seemed ready to burst with astonishment.

"Don't get excited. It's a very natural question, as you will see presently. I wanted to refresh two memories—yours and mine. Your number, if I mistake not, was—"

"4678! There you have it!"

"That is correct. I recollect the figures very well now. Thank you, sir. You don't forget those little episodes of life, nor do you fail to recall, as I see by your start, your career up the river. It wasn't a pleasant one, that's a fact—"

"Curse you!" cried the landlord, "why can't you talk about something else?"

"Maybe I will by and by," was the reply.

"Let's see. You went up in '66 and came back in '72?"

"You have the dates correct."

"This traveled friend of yours wasn't there then—I don't refer to Oliver Dustan now—he came and went after you did; but you knew him. I refer to Vijal Savalli."

Once more Nick Cloman started, but this time he kept his temper in an admirable manner.

"You became well acquainted with him and you worked together. One night a certain safe was broken open and a large amount of money taken."

No answer.

"They never suspected you and your convict friend. They did not look in the right direction. Do you know, Mr. Cloman, that I have the clue to that old crime?"

"You? The deuce you have!"

"I have the letter you dropped on the floor that night. I picked it up myself, and though it gave me a good deal of bother at first, as it was addressed to a fictitious name, I have seen the writer, Oliver Dustan."

"In this city?"

"Never mind that. Oliver Dustan wrote you that letter; but he did not know then that you were engaged in crime, nor that Vijal Savalli was your friend. Now, Mr. Cloman, with what I know, I can bring you up standing for that old crime—"

Savage Nick Cloman seemed to study the little figure at the table.

He was the man's superior in strength. He could leap at him, bear him to the floor and choke the life out of him in a jiffy. After that he could search the room till he found the letter. It wouldn't take him very long to turn the tables on this cool inquisitor and he thought of making the move when another thing happened.

The little man turned the key of a drawer at

the table and took out a letter which he laid on the cloth.

"I keep some things, Mr. Cloman," he said, with a smile. "This is the letter which you dropped that night when Savalli and you robbed the safe of ten thousand dollars, the lion's share of which, as you recall, the man from Barcelona took."

"He took it, that's a fact."

"Now, sir, at whose command did you send up to Marcus Monk's room that newspaper, so folded that he should see the advertisement which Royal Legare had caused to be inserted in it?"

Nick Cloman's jaw dropped.

He caught in a flash as it were the motives of the little man before him. He saw what he was driving at; he was going back to the crime of Number Nine; he was coming, perhaps, to Rana's escape from the Dove-cote.

"I—I don't understand you, sir," said Cloman, hoping by this sentence to catch second wind.

"Shall I enlighten you? The newspaper, eh? Here is the fatal advertisement which Marcus Monk cut from the sheet, and it lured him to his doom."

A piece of paper fell on the table beside the letter and Nick Cloman looked at it with all eyes.

"You sent that paper up to Miss Rana and her father. It was so folded—even marked—that he should see it at once. Now, sir, that scheme didn't originate with you, for you, as a landlord, didn't care to lose two guests whose board was being paid with commendable regularity. Who told you to send that paper up to their rooms so folded?"

Cloman bit his lip and glared at the little inquisitor.

"What right have you to ask me such questions?" he blurted.

"You don't care to answer then?"

"I want to know your authority first."

The little man laid his hand on the letter.

"This ought to tell you that I have a right to ask you certain questions," he said, looking up and encountering the landlord's gaze. "You don't care to have this old letter and the circumstances of its discovery come to light?"

No, he didn't want that.

"Very well. It all lies with you, Nicholas Cloman," and the speaker leaned back in his chair with all the coolness of a bravo.

The landlord of the Dove-cote thought rapidly.

Again he looked at the man before him, and then seemed to calculate the space between them.

"You don't care to tell me, I see?"

Nick Cloman moved a foot forward, but stopped. Something in the little man's eyes seemed to check him.

"It's all right," said the man at the table. "The interview is ended, Nicholas."

The interview ended?

A strange thrill went through the landlord like a knife, cutting its way through every nerve in his body.

"You're going to have me arrested, are you?" he cried.

"I have not said so. I only said that the interview is ended."

"But it means nothing less than an arrest."

"Do you think so? Very well," and the hand reached out, and picked up the letter.

The coolness of the little man was, to say the least exasperating to Nick Cloman.

"What do you want to know about the newspaper for?" he asked.

"I am in search of a little information which you are able to impart. You did not send that paper up to Marcus Monk's room so folded on your own hook. You were paid to do it."

"I was not paid."

"Not in money, perhaps, but you saw a chance to do an old friend a favor. Vijal Savalli suggested the act and you carried it out."

It seemed to landlord Cloman that the floor was actually sinking beneath his feet.

"Who told you this?" he cried.

"We get at some things without the active help of the participants. We know some things that don't help those who do them. This bit of paper went up to Marcus Monk at Vijal Savalli's suggestion, and you were willing to lose two good boarders."

There was now no color in Cloman's face.

He edged toward the door.

"You'll find the door locked," coolly said the little man.

The landlord stopped and for a moment seemed ready to spring at the pigmy; but he took another notion and went forward again.

His manner had changed once more.

"I didn't know what there was in that advertisement," he stammered.

"Of course not," derisively answered his torturer. "Of course a man like you—a man who was once a living number—never looks into certain things, but goes it in the dark. You may not have heard yet that Marcus Monk is under ground."

"I know that. The whole city knows it."

"Then, you are not ignorant of all things. Well, Mr. Cloman, I am through. If you will wait a moment I will unlock the door."

Nick Cloman stepped to one side and saw the little man stand up. He was not more than five feet in height.

But he saw something else; he noticed that the hand carried something which glittered in the light, and when he saw him at the door, he knew that his first movement would bring up a revolver.

It cowed him, a coward at all times, and he actually shivered.

"Good-night, Mr. Cloman," said the little man, opening the door for the landlord to pass out.

Cloman did not move.

The tenant of the room went back to the table.

"What if I tell you the truth?" suddenly cried Nick Cloman, springing to the table and leaning both hands on it as he glared at his questioner.

"I make no promises now. I have all the threads I care to hold at this time."

"You have, eh? You're a ferret—a man-hunter! You have this Marcus Monk crime in hand! You—"

"You are right," and the keen eyes of the little man became riveted on Cloman's face. "I will drag you into the net of guilt so deep that you will wish you had remained Number 4678. You can do as you please—tell all the truth, or swing with the murderer!"

Nick Cloman's head seemed to swim. He tottered to a chair and fell into it, an inert mass of colorless humanity; then springing up, he beat the air with his fist, crying out:

"I did it at Savalli's bidding!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FLIGHT OF GUILT.

PHINEAS TRIPP watched the man without a sign of excitement.

"At Savalli's bidding, eh?" he said.

"Yes. He came to me and got me to do it," answered Cloman.

"Were you obliged to do it?"

"He had me in his fist. He threatened to spoil all my business. I was compelled to help him play his hand against them."

The little detective looked at the landlord of the Dove-cote a moment longer, and then leaned toward him.

"So you took the paper up to Marcus Monk folded by Savalli? He threatened to expose you, did he—to tell the world that you were once a man with a number?"

"That's it."

"What about Savalli's companion?"

Nick Cloman appeared to look amazed.

"I didn't know he had one."

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Cloman? You didn't know that Savalli had a partner, but thought he was playing a game all by himself? See here! You are not that sort of man."

"What do you mean?" cried the landlord.

"I'm deep in the mire—I see that now—and here you are trying to connect me with some one else."

Tripp grinned.

"Very well. You can go now."

Nick started. He expected to be placed under arrest, and now that he had been set at liberty he did not know what to make of it.

"You can go back to the Dove-cote, I say."

The rascal picked up his hat and turned toward the door. An hour previous to this scene he would have laughed at the idea of a little man like Phineas Tripp getting anything out of him. He would have hooted at the idea that he would betray Savalli to the detective, and in doing so get his own foot into the snare.

He looked at the detective in a dazed manner.

"Don't you think you have put a wrong estimate on me?" he suddenly asked.

"Why should I?" queried the ferret. "Don't I know what you have been? Therefore, why should I wrongly estimate you, Mr. Cloman?"

"You are going to have me watched, aren't you?"

"I haven't said so."

"You are going to give me trouble. You intend to break up my business by going back over my life trail."

"You deserve to be routed out from among honest people by the associates you have been keeping."

"Do you refer to Savalli?"

"To half a dozen other men not much better, but to the Spaniard in particular, if you must know. Good-night."

Nick passed out and down the stairs that led to the street.

He looked like a hunted wolf. His hands were clinched and his breath came in gasps.

"I can't go back and be faced by Savalli after he discovers that I have been compelled to give him away," he said to himself. "Why did I fall into the ferret's net? I'm a fool and my wife will say so promptly when I tell her. But I won't tell her, and I daren't face Savalli after what I have done."

He was a wretched man as he stopped underneath a lamp and looked about him.

No one was in sight. Then he looked back at the house in which he had faced the little man who had drawn the secret from him.

"Why not go back in the hall and wait for him? That house isn't his abode. I know where

their den is. He hired that house to make the very play he made against me. He will be coming down the stairs presently and the hall is dark enough, as I noticed. That man is against me. He intends to profit by what I was forced to tell him to-night; and he and his partner won't let up till all of us are in the net of the law. I don't want to go back up the river again. I don't want to resume my old garb and be once more the man with the number. Why not?"

He looked at the house again and then stole back into the hallway.

It was dark and caused the old house to look quite deserted.

What a place for an ambush it was; what a spot for the spring of a human tiger, and as Nick Cloman hugged the corner and glanced up the dark staircase, he felt his hot blood at his fingertips and his heart leaped into his throat with a sudden impulse of anger.

The house was not Phineas Tripp's home. He knew that.

While he waited for the little detective to descend the stairs, he thought of a good many things; but his thoughts always came back to the present mission.

"How shall I catch him?" he asked himself. "Shall I seize him by the throat and dash him against the wall? I can handle him with ease if he will only keep his eyes off me! That's what knocked me all to pieces awhile ago. I can't stand eyes like them. Ha! here he comes."

A door overhead had opened and shut and Nick Cloman held his breath.

Some one was on the stairs and in another moment footsteps came down.

He tried to catch sight of the figure nearing him, never doubting for a moment that Phineas Tripp was walking into the death net.

On, on came the victim.

Nick saw the man reach the last step and in another second he was on the floor of the hall and within reach of his eager hands.

For him to spring forward and seize his prey was the work of an instant. He dashed at the man and threw him against the wall.

"What's this?" cried a voice as they struck the wall. "Have I fallen into the hands of the police?"

It was a strange voice to Nick Cloman and not the one which had questioned him.

He almost dropped his man and fell back.

"What's the matter?" cried a woman's voice from the top of the stairs.

"Heavens! the wrong man!" thought the landlord of the Dove-cote, as he tried to get away; but now he was clutched by a hand and the following moment a light flashed in his face.

He saw then a face he had not seen before that night. It was not the face of the ferret of Gotham; but one entirely strange, though the eyes had a wild, hunted look.

"Put him out!" cried the woman overhead.

"All right, Iyra. Out he goes!"

Nick Cloman went headlong toward the door, which was jerked open to facilitate his exit; and all at once he shot out into the street like a shell from a mortar.

He landed in the gutter and picked himself up with curses and gnashings of teeth.

"That beats all the times I ever had," said he. "Why, that man has the strength of a giant, and when the woman said: 'Put him out,' out I went."

Pulling himself together, the landlord of the Dove-cote turned his steps homeward. He was at war with himself, and the more he thought of his escapade the angrier he became.

"How can I meet Savalli, and yet he ought to know that certain information is in the hands of Tripp & Tracer—the wolves on the trail. He asked me about Savalli's partner. Ah, I knew who he meant all along; but I played ignorance so well that I guess I deceived him."

He walked some squares when he suddenly stopped and exclaimed:

"I wonder what's become of the girl who ran off from the Dove-cote: Did she fall into the hands of the detective? That's where he got the cue for questioning me. Wait! I will see the other man before I go home. I think I know where to find him from words dropped by Vijal the other morning. He wasn't lost with the Crusader after all. It's not very late, and a man of his stamp wouldn't be apt to go to bed very early these nights."

The landlord turned back to the next street and vanished. In ten minutes he had halted in front of a house and was climbing a flight of steps which recalled the ones he had lately descended.

At a certain door he knocked to hear some one beyond it ask who was there.

"It's me!" said Cloman.

"But that's rather indefinite," responded the man on the inside.

"Nicholas Cloman, then."

The door was unlocked and the landlord crossed the threshold.

"It's him," he muttered as he caught sight of the person who stared at him from the middle of the room.

"You're all alone, eh?" said Nick.

"Just now I am, Mr. Cloman," answered Royal Legare. "Why am I indebted to you for this late call?"

"It is a little unexpected, that's a fact."
"Did you come from Vijal, or are you here on business for yourself?"

"The latter, I guess. We'll say so, anyhow, Mr.—"

"My name is Totten—Philip Totten."

"That's pretty good," grinned Nick. "Totten! I used to know a Totten, but that was long ago. Well, Mr. Totten, do you know that you're in danger?"

Royal Legare started.

In danger? Why shouldn't he be, living in the city from which it was believed the Crusader had sailed with an infernal machine on board?

"You've read the mate's story, of course. Vijal and I are keeping your secret, and you can depend on us. But there are the detectives, some of whom are sharper than foxes."

"I know that. They are on the alert. But they won't pick me up. Unless they play their full hand within the next twenty-four hours, they will lose the game altogether."

"Going to give them the slip, eh?"

"Perhaps," said Legare, dubiously, as he looked at the convict landlord.

"They may find you before morning."

"What are you driving at?" cried Legare. "Why have you come to this house at this hour? I didn't know you had the address."

"Oh, that's all right. It's safe with me. You're alone, eh?"

"Quite, as I have told you."

Cloman took a hasty look around the little room which had been Royal Legare's hiding-place for some time.

In another minute he had advanced a step and his hand fell upon the wondering man's arm.

"You had better go right away," he said. "They are going to close in on Vijal."

"On Savalli?" cried Legare.

"Yes, on the man from Barcelona."

Royal Legare breathed hard.

It seemed to him that the last throw in the game had been made, and that it had gone against him. He disengaged himself from Cloman's grip and stammered:

"There must have been a traitor."

"I don't know. You're not safe here."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind. I know, and that ought to be sufficient to a wise man. They don't intend to arrest Garish Legare; but you are the man they want."

"You lie, Nicholas Cloman!"

The landlord of the Dove-cote bit his lip.

"Very well, then," he said in a careless manner as he retreated toward the door. "Just as you please. When they swoop down upon you, remember that Nick Cloman offered you safety."

"In your trap?" cried Legare.

"No. I know a safer place than that."

The hidden man seized the landlord's arm and exclaimed:

"I place myself in your hands," said he.

"Will you tell Vijal where I am to be found?"

"Do you trust Vijal Savalli?"

"Yes, yes."

"They want him, too."

"I know that."

"They want him, not for the murder of Marcus Monk, but for the killing of Coppers, the burglar found dead before your safe."

"Why don't they want him for the murder of Marcus Monk?"

"It's very simple, I'm real sorry to say, Mr. Totten. They don't believe he killed him."

There was not a vestige of color in Royal Legare's cheeks; but he had no time to question Nick Cloman further, for that worthy was pulling at his sleeve.

"You don't need to take anything away. We'll come back after what you have here, or at least I will. I am saving your precious neck, Mr. Totten. As sure as there's a sky above us, it will lengthen if you try to hide in this house another day."

Royal Legare sprang to the escape. He pulled his hat over his eyes and drew the collar of his dark coat around his face. With the hand of Nick Cloman on his arm he went down the staircase and out into the street, feeling, no doubt, the shadows of vengeance closing round him like a pack of wolves.

They went off together, and after a long walk Cloman turned into an alley-like street and opened a door.

"I got hold of this property out of my savings," said he, as he led his companion inside.

It was not a very nice room that in which Royal Legare found himself. It was cold and cheerless, but a lot of coal lay on the long-unused grate, and as the landlord struck a match, he fell back starting at his own shadow.

"Are you sure Vijal will find me here?" he nervously asked.

"If I tell him, he will," was the reply.

"And you will tell him? I can't get along without Vijal."

"We'll see," and Nick Cloman turned to the door and bade Legare good-night before he could put in another word.

"What have I done?" cried the man left behind. "Why did I put such trust in that man and follow him to this house? Where am I, anyhow? In what part of the city? And is it true that they are at my heels? Vijal ought to

know this. Vijal does know it and I am in the hands of another man who, after all, may be an enemy."

His words came back to him with a strange echo. He struck a match and lit the kindling on the grate, and as the flames danced upward, he caught a glimpse of his own white, hunted face in the mirror on the wall.

It caused him to start with a wild cry.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SWEETHEART WORTH HAVING.

RANA MONK was more than astonished when she saw the detective open the package which contained, as he told her, her father's certificates of deposits in the Bank of England.

She might have made this discovery if she had looked, but she had carried away the packet without doing so, and it was left to Phineas Tripp to make the startling revelation.

It was the first inkling she had received that her father was wealthy at the time of his death. He had never told her about his wealth, and she had been led to understand that he had but little money beyond their actual needs.

Fifty thousand pounds in the Bank of England meant a fortune of a quarter of a million dollars; but this was not all.

When she recovered somewhat from her astonishment, Phineas Tripp told her that a man of the name of Dustan held in trust for her fifty thousand dollars additional in American notes.

It was with a wildly-beating heart that she went from the detectives' den that night to the cozy room to which she was escorted by Tracer.

Some things were clearing of their own accord.

A motive for her father's murder had been found. The hand that struck him down must have belonged to a man who knew of Marcus Monk's wealth, so that the murder was a bold stroke in a game for gold.

Silas Tracer went back to the den and found Phineas waiting for him.

"What say you now, Silas?" asked the little man.

"What I have said before."

"Savalli or Legare?"

"Both," sentimentally answered Tracer.

"Where is little Josie?"

"Safe. I took her over to Cora's where she will have a home. I shall keep Savalli's gloves as a memento of our tussle in the dark of Coppers's house, and—"

He looked toward the door and then crossed the room.

"Who's out there?" asked Phineas, as the other detective opened the door.

"Wait," said Silas, as he vanished.

"Who was it?" asked Tripp, as he came back with a smile on his face.

"It was a woman. She's standing down on the street looking up at the windows."

Phineas went to the front window and looked out.

"Where is she?"

"Over on the corner yonder."

Sure enough, a woman with a shawl over her ample shoulders was standing on the corner opposite the place, and her face, or as much of it as the detectives could see, was turned toward the window.

"Do you know her, Silas?"

"Yes. It is Miss Lockwood."

"Ah, the maid of Number Nine."

"The maid and Garish Legare's sweetheart."

"Why didn't you catch her?"

"And bring her in? She got to the door, but some how or other her heart seemed to fail her at the last moment and she went back. There she goes now."

"I would like to see her, Silas."

"Now?"

"Now."

In another moment the figure of Silas Tracer had vanished and a woman who was hurrying along on the sidewalk was checked, and she saw his eyes piercing her through as she turned upon him.

"He wants to see you," said Tracer.

"Do you mean— Ah! you are the other one I see; you are the man who came to the house and found the dagger under his bed. I won't go back with you."

"But you were at the door a moment ago—"

"I'll go," broke in Lyra Lockwood. "I have news for both of you. I can't keep it back any longer."

She came back with Silas Tracer and the detective led her across the room to a chair.

As she took a seat and threw back her veil, Phineas Tripp who was watching her closely, saw how pale her beautiful face was and for a moment he let her get second wind before he addressed her.

"It's a raw night, Miss Lockwood," began the little ferret.

The maid seemed to shiver as she glanced at the fire which warmed the den.

"You have come a long way. You have come out on an important mission. Did he send you?"

"Garish, you mean?"

"Yes, the young man."

"No. He doesn't know that I came hither to see you two men. I am here of my own accord. What have you done with the dagger you discovered in my room?"

She was looking at Phineas Tripp as she spoke and her face seemed to increase its whiteness.

"In your room, miss?"

"Yes, sir. I know you found it. Come, don't deceive me. I will tell you all about it. I have kept it back too long already. You found it where I had hidden it."

The little hand of Tripp opened a drawer in the table and Lyra started with a cry when she saw him lay a dagger on the table.

"That is it! You see I thought one of you had found it," she exclaimed. "I tried to hide it so that it would not be found at all; but that wasn't right."

She looked at the blade as she spoke and then after a pause continued:

"He knew nothing of this. I have kept it from him. You will see that it looks like the dagger one of you—Mr. Tracer, I believe—found on the table the morning after the murder at Number Nine."

"It is just like it, miss."

"Bless you, it is the same one!" cried Lyra with a light laugh. "Haven't you heard that Officer Grabbmen, the man who was permitted to take charge of the dagger, had been robbed? Well, gentlemen, the robber sits before you."

"I would have guessed that without a confession," said Tripp. "So you saw fit to take the dagger from Officer Grabbmen, miss?"

"Yes, sir, and one of you saw fit to despoil me in turn."

"I did it, Miss Lockwood."

Lyra turned toward Phineas Tripp and looked at him for a moment in silence.

"I would have guessed it was you. But never mind that. I forgive you. Well, that is the dagger which killed Marcus Monk; but it is not the one Garish Legare bought of the old dagger-seller."

The detectives made no reply.

"It is what they call a Karan, Garish tells me. You see he nicks all his daggers. This one is nicked and with a 'G,' too."

"I've noticed that, miss."

"Now, sir, here are three more of his daggers," and Lyra took from beneath her shawls a package done up in strong but light paper.

Out rolled three daggers when she opened the package, and her hand took up one as she bent toward the drop-light.

"Have you examined the 'G' with the microscope?" she asked Phineas Tripp.

"I have, miss."

"Now, sir, please to examine the 'G's' on these dagger-hilts."

Phineas took a magnifying glass from the drawer and proceeded to do so.

After awhile he took up the Karan blade and compared the letters.

"Don't you see a difference?" asked Lyra quietly, but in tones of triumph.

"There is a difference."

"And the 'G's' on the three hilts are exactly alike?"

"Yes, but Garish Legare says that the time he stamped the Karan in his possession the stamp broke."

"That is true. I saw him stamp it. He did it in my presence when he brought the dagger home. I saw the stamp break."

"A break is shown in the 'G' on the hilt of this Karan."

"Yes. But look at it again, Mr. Tripp. I don't want to shield the guilty."

Phineas paid considerable attention to the dagger-hilt, and at last he looked up and encountered Lyra Lockwood's gaze.

"Now another thing. Some of the hilts of these daggers unscrew," said the girl.

"But this one does not."

"Oh, you have tried it, then?"

Phineas Tripp confessed that he had.

"There are secrets which are kept from men as shrewd as you and your friend," with a glance at Tracer. "Let me have the dagger, please."

Lyra took it and with her nail pressed a little spring at the bottom of the hilt, then quickly unscrewed the same and handed it to the astonished detective.

"Good!" cried Silas Tracer.

"You will discover a bit of paper in the hollow hilt," continued the girl.

Tripp shook it out and picked up what fell upon the table.

"Look at it."

The ferret eyes of the city shadow were soon reading some writing on the paper which he had picked up.

"What does it say, Mr. Tripp?" asked the maid.

Phineas Tripp read aloud:

"Bought of Cortelono, Jan. 10. G. L."

The little detective looked up and smiled.

"It's against him, that writing," said the watchful girl. "That seems to tell you that Garish Legare bought that dagger of Cortelono on the Tenth of January. Well, sir, he never

placed that in the hilt. That isn't his chirography. What does this look like?"

The maid took a letter from her bosom and opened it in Phineas Tripp's presence.

"Compare the letter and the writing on the paper you found in the hilt," she said.

They were placed together and carefully studied by the little ferret.

"What do you say, Mr. Tripp?"

"They seem to have been written by the same hand."

"Yes, sir. But by whose?"

"Savalli's?"

"Ah, do you think so?" laughed Miss Lockwood.

"I asked you, miss," said Phineas.

"No, I don't think they emanated from Senor Savalli's hand, though I almost wish they had."

"Who wrote the letter? You have torn the signature off, I see."

"Just to mystify you a little," smiled the girl.

"But the letter?"

"It was written by Royal Legare!"

Silence followed the maid's reply.

The twin sharps looked first at one another and then across the table at her, as calm now as a summer's nooning.

"Gentlemen, all I have said is true," she went on. "I came down-town to-night in the interest of justice. I have nothing else to serve. I saw the old man dead in his chair. I am the person who gave the alarm. I forgot one thing that morning. I should have gone up to Garish's room at once. I might have seen the dagger-sheath on the floor and the blood-smears. Perhaps if I had seen them I might have carried off one and washed out the others. You must know that I love the man hunted by the police. I wish I could turn detective and help you—"

"What else have you done, Miss Lockwood?" cried Silas Tracer.

"I hope I have done something in that direction," was the modestly spoken reply.

"Well, you have, that's a fact," and Tripp's eyes wandered to the dagger-hilt lying on the table. "Did Garish Legare tell you to rob Officer Grabbem?"

"No; but he told me that some of the hilts of these Karans unscrew, and that was enough for me. Good-night, gentlemen. I will go back to him now."

And as the door closed on Lyra Lockwood, Silas Tracer struck the table with his fist and exclaimed:

"Jupiter! the girl's worth both of us, Phineas."

"It's love and cunning," was the reply, and the little hand wandered to the unhilted blade under the lamp.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FACE TO FACE.

THE man from Barcelona was in a dilemma; he had suddenly lost Royal Legare, his partner in crime, and as he stood in the middle of the room where he had left him last, he looked around with a mute appeal for the solution of the puzzle.

Savalli did not know that Nick Cloman had spirited Legare away, as he knew nothing of the confrontation by Phineas Tripp, whereat Cloman had made a damaging confession against him (Savalli).

There was nothing in the room to tell him whither Legare had gone, and the Spaniard was nonplused.

"It can't be that he has fallen into the hands of the ferrets," said he. "And I won't believe that he has lost heart and confessed. There's too much at stake for him to do that, and then he is not that sort of man."

He passed out of the room and vanished.

An hour later he turned up rather suddenly at the Dove-cote and found Mrs. Nick behind the counter.

"Where's Nick?" asked Savalli, fixing his hawk-like eyes on the woman.

"He hasn't come in yet."

"But that doesn't answer me."

"It's the best reply I can give you, for I don't know where he is."

"When did he go out?"

"He got a letter and went off on account of it."

"A letter, eh? What was it about?"

"A gentleman wanted to see him."

"What gentleman?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Didn't you see the letter?"

"I read it, but there was no name signed to the letter."

"Somewhat mysterious, then? Have you got it in the house?"

"No; he took it with him."

Savalli's lips came together with a curse and he was leaving the place when the woman said:

"Have you no clue to the girl who got away from here?"

He turned like a person shot in the back.

"No, have you?"

"Do you think I would have asked you that question if I had?" answered the woman, somewhat tartly.

Savalli grinned.

"I haven't found her, but I will. You don't think a girl is going to outwit me, do you, Mrs. C.?"

"Not from what I know of Savalli."

"She gave us a nice game, didn't she?" the man had approached the counter and was leaning on it with his face turned to the woman, who was slightly pale and anxious. "What's become of her baggage?"

"It's where she left it—at least all she didn't take along."

"Up in her room, eh?"

"Yes. You know where it is, Savalli."

Without more ado, he went up to the room formerly occupied by Rana Monk and opened the old trunk in one corner. This was not very hard to do for it was not so much as locked. In another instant he was throwing everything out on the floor.

"It's not here even if he ever confided it to this old thing," he said as he threw the things back into the trunk with expressions of disgust. "I wonder if he did leave anything with Dustan? He knew him in England and he may have made him his banker."

He came back to the little office of the Dove-cote and again startled Mrs. Cloman who was still on duty there.

"Not back yet?"

"No, sir. Did the trip do you any good?"

"Not much," smiled Savalli, and then he said good-night and walked out.

"What has become of Legare? That's the question?" he exclaimed on the side-walk. "Why did he go away and leave no letter for me? Is it a flight? Well, he can't afford to cut the man from Barcelona. He knows too much!"

There was a threat in the last sentence which was unheard save by the wind which swept round the corner and touched the Spaniard's face.

Vijal Savalli started off at a good pace which carried him across the city and after awhile to a spot which had a tragic interest for the curious.

It was the scene of the crime of Number Nine and he saw loom before him in the light the fatal house of two dark tragedies.

The hour was late and still. No pedestrians came in sight as Savalli looked at the old house and seemed to study it.

He passed it, but soon reappeared in the narrow back yard behind it.

Taking a key from his pocket, he opened the rear door and passed in.

Savalli seemed at home in the silent place of crime for he walked straight to the fatal room and opened the door.

In another moment he had turned on the gas and had seen that the curtains were so closely drawn that not a particle of light could leave the chamber.

He knelt in front of the steel safe and tried the knob.

It moved in his hand and after a few manipulations, he swung back the steel door and bent nearer.

"He hasn't been here since, or he would have moved some of these things," said he. "Royal Legare hasn't come to the old place. I am sure of that. In the name of common sense, where is he?"

From the safe he went to the desk where he took a chair.

A dark stain near the edge of the desk attracted him and he smiled grimly.

"Enough to hang him if I but opened my mouth," he laughed. "This is a blood-spot like those in the young man's room. Ha! I wonder if they ever looked into the hilt of the dagger? We overlooked that point. But wait! I won't put them on that just now. The blade is in Officer Grabbem's hands and a mysterious note will do the business at any time. Just now I want to know what's become of Royal Legare. He has vanished as if he never existed at all. And just when I was clearing the way for the fortune! True the girl has disappeared, but I can pick her up; yes, and get rid of these two ferrets who have persistently dogged my steps."

He was startled by a sound which seemed to come from the rear of the house.

In a flash he lowered the light in the room and sprang to a corner opposite the one occupied by the safe.

"Some one besides myself is in the old house," he exclaimed. "I will see what brings that person hither."

He heard footsteps in the hall and by and by the door opened.

Some one came into the room and he heard the rustle of garments as the visitor passed to the desk.

Vijal Savalli, with the eyes of a fox, was trying to catch the outlines of Number Nine's visitor, and when he saw a match flash up and a hand sweep toward the drop-light, he almost gave himself away with a cry.

Miss Lyra Lockwood stood at the desk!

There was no mistaking the trim figure of Garish Legare's humble sweetheart, and while he watched her he could not help comparing her with Rana Monk.

Lyra, after lighting the gas, took a seat at the

desk and began to rummage through the drawers.

She seemed to be looking for something which persistently escaped her eyes, and all the time she was watched by the concealed villain on the other side of the room.

All at once Lyra rose and came toward the safe.

Her back was turned to Savalli, and remembering that near where he stood there was a cupboard set in the wall which the girl might want to search next, he resolved to slip from the room while she was at the safe.

Eager to escape, he slipped from the spot; but in crossing the floor he struck the round of a chair which made a noise which caused the maid to turn in an instant.

They stood face to face!

Lyra Lockwood looked at the tan-faced man with the bright eyes and small hands, and he in return watched her like a hawk.

For a moment not a single word passed between them and then the girl was the first to speak.

"You here, Senor Savalli?" she cried.

He laughed like a fiend, showing his white teeth by the parting of his thin, sensual lips.

"And so you have chosen this time to visit the old house, have you?" he asked.

"I have."

"Did he send you? Did the young fellow who is so badly wanted by the law send you back to the scene of his crime?"

She seemed to get new nerves at this; she straightened and came toward him, but stopped at the desk and rested the tips of her fingers upon its mahogany edges.

"That's a nice question for you, now isn't it?" she cried. "You of all men ought to be the last to utter such words. You, Senor Savalli, the holder of one if not two of the darkest secrets in this great city—you, I say, ought to be the last person to throw out such infamous insinuations."

"Ha! you're inclined to be facetious. Why, my girl, they have already discovered that you have gone to him; that you are trying to shield him from the law."

"Very well. Have it that way, if you like. And since I have gone this far, know, Vijal Savalli, that I will stand between him and the trail-hounds to the last, and that I will not desert the innocent, no matter if they did find the dagger-sheath in his room and blood-smears on the carpet!"

"Pretty conclusive evidence, I call that."

He was eying her with eyes that never left her for a moment, and all at once with a movement which Lyra did not expect, he crossed a breadth of carpet and leaned forward till he could have touched her.

"What brought you back to the house to-night?" he said.

"Do you really care to know?"

"You will not tell me, so what's the use of my trying to find out?"

"I am here to look for Royal Legare's will."

"What?"

"For his will. I try to make myself understood."

"He never made a will. When he sailed in the Crusader—"

Miss Lockwood burst into a laugh, and her hand suddenly covered him.

"When did he sail in the Crusader? That is news to me!" she cried.

There was no reply.

"Royal Legare wrote a will six months ago. I saw it written. I signed it. He left it in this room; he told me so, and unless it has been taken away, it is there yet."

She crossed the chamber to the place where he had at first concealed himself.

"Stand back!" she said, looking over her shoulder at him. "There is a secret niche in this wall. Ah, here is the button!"

At that moment a door flew open in the wall and Savalli saw a deep niche at the girl's hand.

"Is it in there?" he cried.

"It is here! and there is something more here than the will of Royal Legare. Here is a written story of his life. It was not to be discovered till after death. He told me so at the time, and I happened to see him hide the papers in this niche, and—"

"Let me see, miss."

But the maid fell back with a cry of alarm, and held the papers from him.

"Let you feel these papers in your hands? The last man who shall touch them!"

She moved toward the door, but he threw himself into her path.

"You don't get out of this room till I have seen what you hold in your hand."

"Don't I?"

Something came up with the hand, which suddenly raised from her side, and Vijal Savalli was looking into the merciless muzzle of a revolver which Lyra gripped with nerves of steel.

"One step, one act, and I will leave you, the third victim of this red room, dead on the carpet, Vijal Savalli!" and with the last word she stepped coolly toward the door, opened it and vanished, while the baffled rascal stood statue-like and breathless in the middle of the deadly room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HAND OF TRACER.

MISS LYRA LOCKWOOD had gone straight from the detectives' den to Number Nine, where she had encountered Savalli, as we have just detailed.

Armed with the papers which she carried off, she went, not back to the ferret's, but to another part of the city, where she laid her find before a young man who looked at her with profound astonishment.

This person was Garish Legare, and while he listened to Lyra's narrative he looked at the papers she had brought back.

As for Savalli, he went from the old mansion on the avenue with his cunning brain in a strange whirl.

He almost staggered back to the streets, and the cool air served to revive him and bring back a natural circulation of the blood.

"As cool as a she-demon!" he exclaimed. "I never would have given a girl of her make-up credit for having such nerve. I believe she would have carried out her threat to leave me dead on the floor, for there was 'shoot' in her eye. Legare never told me anything about the will and the story of his life. I wish I could find him. I'd read to him the riot act in language which he could not mistake. The girl was too cool for me, and then, she was so frank, besides."

Savalli went back to the room where he had left Royal Legare.

The missing man had not come back.

It was getting late now, and Savalli concluded not to waste any more of the night looking for his companion, and he retired.

It was midnight by the clocks of Gotham when Nick Cloman slipped back to his house from the place to which he had conducted Royal Legare.

Mrs. Cloman was up waiting for him and the first piece of information he heard was about Savalli's visit.

Nick started.

Had the Spaniard heard that he had betrayed him to Phineas Tripp, the detective?

Was he already on his heels, and had he come to the hotel for the purpose of getting even with him, no matter if the cool-headed ferret had forced from him the words of treachery?

He did not know what to think.

"I'll be back soon," he said to his wife, as he started toward the door.

"What, you're not going off again?"

"I have to, my dear."

"But what's up?"

She caught his arm and tried to hold him back; but he jerked loose and ran from the house.

"Jehosaphat! on my track already?" gasped Nick. "How did he find out that I told Phineas Tripp? In the fool's name, who put him on the alert? He is as dangerous as a lion, and I must play a swift hand with Royal Legare's help if I beat him."

He dodged through the shadows of the streets as if Savalli was on his heels when, in fact, at that very moment that worthy was preparing for bed; he pulled up in front of a small house into which he let himself, and he rapped at a door to hear a man on the inside ask who was there.

"It's Nick," he said and was admitted to see Royal Legare standing at the door with a cocked revolver in his hand.

"What brought you back so soon?" he asked the man.

"I'll tell you in a moment. They've caught Savalli."

There was a sharp cry and Legare almost fell into the chair at which he was standing.

"Caught Savalli?" he gasped.

"Yes; don't you see how lucky your escape from the other place? What if I hadn't taken you off? What—"

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," broke in the white-faced man. "I owe you my life."

"That's all right. I don't charge any thing for what I've done. But I'm here to say that perhaps you're in danger. Do you know what they will do with that coward Spaniard? They'll play him against you; but we'll outwit them all, Legare."

"Yes, yes; we'll beat them!"

He did not seem to know what he was saying, and Nick Cloman eyed the man with eyes full of low cunning.

"I am sure I could play a neat little hand if I only had a little money," said Nick.

"How much?" cried Legare, springing to the bed and halting there.

"It might take more than you have at your command just now."

"I don't know. I have a good deal."

Nick seemed to start.

"If I had say two thousand—it's a cool game and will require a little outlay—I—"

"You shall have it! Don't think I am penniless because I am here. We will have a good deal more by and by. How much? Will two thousand be enough?"

"I—I—will try it with that?"

"Better take another thousand!" exclaimed

Legare, counting out the last amount on the table.

Cloman pounced upon the money and thrust it into his bosom.

"We'll be all O. K. in the morning. They won't look for you here, Legare, and I'm the man as knows a thing or two if I am a landlord and an 'ex,' ha, ha, ha!"

Royal Legare saw Nick Cloman depart with the money and then he locked the door.

At the same moment a human face which had been glued to the window during the startling interview was withdrawn, and a figure slipped from the sloping roof of the rear building in time to catch sight of Nick on the street.

"That's what I call feathering one's nest!" chuckled the landlord of the Dove-cote as he struck the pavement and darted off. "It took a good deal of cheek to tell him what he may find out to be a lie within the next twelve hours. But it will make him stay close to the old house and shun every appearance of capture. Let me see. Which way shall I take? I can catch a ferry and then a train on the other side of the river."

He started toward Cortlandt street and reached the boat which was in the act of pulling out for the Jersey side.

He did not see the figure which had kept at his heels with the persistence of the bloodhound; he did not see the man who took a seat where he could watch him, nor dream that at that very moment he was under the eyes of as cool a ferret as ever found a clue.

Nick Cloman with the three thousand dollars near his heart entered the depot on the Jersey side and immediately consulted the general time-table.

He was still watched.

"In ten minutes," he muttered. "By Jove! this is what I call making time. Mrs. C. can run the trap and make all she can out of the plant; but I'll be safe and have something to start upon in another part of the country."

A man who came up at that moment asked him a question about the next train which he could not answer.

Then to Nick's disgust the questioner took a seat alongside of him.

"Going off, eh?" asked the stranger.

Nick started. It was very impudent, he thought, but he kept down his ire.

"Coming back soon?"

"I am going off. I don't know when I will be back. I don't know where I'm going. Haven't bought my ticket yet. I'll telegraph you if you insist upon it," snapped Nick like pistol-shots as he turned full upon the man and looked him in the face.

The next moment he seemed to shiver in every vein.

He had caught full sight of the face of the man on the seat with him and something like a cold chill went all over his body.

"I guess you needn't telegraph," said the stranger. "I'm quite sure it won't be necessary, Nicholas Cloman, alias Number 4678."

Nick would have sprung from the man if he had had the power.

He would have rushed from the depot and vanished in the night; but he could not stir.

"Silas Tracer!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that's my name," was the answer. "I thought you were going off with a good deal of money—"

"I?"

"With three thousand dollars, paid within the last hour by Royal Legare."

The jaw of the landlord of the Dove-cote seemed to drop upon his chin.

"You were somewhere in the neighborhood, weren't you?" he cried. "I might have thought that."

"Generally on hand, Nicholas. Let's go back to New York."

Cloman rose as meek as a lamb and they walked from the depot together.

"I'll give you half—all of it—for an hour's grace!" he suddenly said.

"Why should you, Nicholas? You never killed any one."

"But I'll have to go back to my old number."

"That's not certain."

He seemed to breathe freer and they reached the boat.

Silas Tracer took a seat at his prisoner's side and the heavily laden ferry-boat swept out into the stream.

Far beyond them sparkled and flashed the million-and-one lights of New York. Nick Cloman watched them awhile in sullen silence, and then his gaze wandered to the waters that boiled in the wake of the ferry-boat.

All at once he sprang up and darted toward the waves. It was like the start of a deer.

Quick as a flash, however, the figure of Silas Tracer bounded after the villain; but he barely touched the garments worn by Nick as that worthy plunged overboard to the cries of half a dozen excited passengers.

In another second the body of Cloman vanished, but it was soon seen by watchful eyes as the boat pulled round, and Tracer plunged after it, clutching the floating head ere it could be swept out of his reach.

They were pulled on board, the detective and

his victim, and the boat proceeded on her way again.

Nick presented a ludicrous aspect as he shivered in the cabin, watched with quiet eyes by the man from whose clutches the guilty never escape; and when the boat pulled into its slip a cab was secured and Tracer and his prey stepped into it.

Ten minutes later Nick Cloman was ushered into the presence of the little man who had drawn from his lips the confession about the decoy advertisement, and he slunk toward the fire and dropped into the chair there.

"The river's cold, Phineas. It's the right time of year to have cold water," observed Tracer with a grin as he contemplated Nick a moment.

Nick felt a shiver pass up his spine. It was a cold bath sure enough.

All at once he turned upon the two detectives and after eying them a moment, he cried out:

"It's no use! You fellows beat Old Nick. When you get after a man he never has a moment's peace."

"That's what we're here for," quietly said Phineas Tripp.

"What do you want with me? I'm ready to tell all I know and then go back to the old number or perhaps a higher one. It's all one to me. Do you want to know what I know about Savalli, or where Royal Legare is?"

"Dry your clothes first. We're in no hurry, Mr. Cloman."

"No, I want to tell it all as soon as possible. I want to get away from the hand of that infernal Spaniard who killed Coppers."

"How do you know he killed him?"

"How do I know it? Why, bless you, he was absent from the Dove-cote that night. When he came back he gave me some money and among the pieces was that."

The wet hands of Nick flipped something which landed on the table.

"I guess he didn't look on but one side of the coin," he went on as Phineas turned the piece of silver. "Ah! you see what it says."

"Yes; 'O. L. K. 1844.'"

"Well you know what the initials mean?"

"Coppers's real name was Oran L. Kenwick—the prison record shows that."

"Well, Savalli gave me that piece of money the night Coppers was killed in Number Nine."

Phineas Tripp was as expressionless as the Sphinx.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LETTER TO OFFICER GRABBE.

THE next morning Vijal Savalli rose with a fixed determination.

He was determined to find out what had become of Royal Legare, because he did not want to let that person slip through his fingers and thus cheat him out of a victory for which both he and Legare had been plotting.

Once more he went back to the old hiding-place, but there were no signs of Legare's return to be seen.

Neither could he find Nick Cloman.

He was not aware that the landlord of the Dove-cote had fallen into Tracer's hands; and the papers which would have told him of the rescue in the river did not fall into his clutches.

If he had looked in the right place he would have found the object of his quest.

Royal Legare had not stirred from the room where he had seen Nick for the last time.

That worthy had sneaked off with the three thousand dollars concealed under his coat, but he had not come back to report results.

Legare was like a haunted man in every respect.

He started at every sound that approached his abode, and whenever footsteps came up the stairs, he cocked a revolver and waited.

It was getting toward noon when a rap sounded on the door and in his usual tones he asked who was there.

"A gentleman on business," was the answer.

"But who?" persisted Legare.

"John Story, with news of importance."

Royal Legare fell back from the door without opening it.

"It is the wolf—the enemy!" said he with white face. "Let me see."

He rushed to the rear window of the room and looked out.

There was a sloping roof beneath it and the jump was not great.

The rap was repeated and then the knob turned.

"That proves it!" cried the man and he raised the sash.

Lowering his body from the window, he hung for a moment along the wall of the house and then dropped.

He struck the roof and steadied himself a moment, then crept to the edge and dropped again, this time to the ground.

He was out of the house anyway.

Ignorant of the premises to which Nick had conducted him after dark, he was undecided for a moment; but seeing a half open door, he ran toward it, threw it open and a minute later found himself on the street.

He breathed hard like a hunted stag.

"Why not go back to the old nest?" he said. "Savalli may come there to look for me."

Chuckling to himself over the trick he had played on the unknown man at the door, he started off and turned up in front of the house from which Nick had led him.

He carried the key of the room in his pocket and in a moment he was at the door.

Of course he found the old nest deserted, but there was proof abundant that Savalli had been there.

Royal Legare locked the door and took a chair.

Never until that moment had he felt what it was to be a hunted man, never had he been under a ban like that one.

"No!" he cried, "the game's not up yet. Savalli will come and then we will—"

He stopped.

Some one was just outside the door and as he started up, clutching a revolver, around whose butt he wrapped his long fingers with the energy of despair, his face lost color and he was again the lion brought to bay.

"Who's there?"

"Vijal."

This time he knew the voice and unbarred the door.

The man from Barcelona walked in.

"It was a lie, thank heaven!" cried Legare as he stared at the Spaniard.

"What was a lie?"

"Why, the story of your arrest."

Savalli laughed.

"My presence here proves that. Arrested? Who said I had been taken?"

"Nick Cloman."

"Ha, then that fellow has been hoodwinking you? Well, I don't doubt that. Did you follow him off last night?"

"Yes."

"But came back when you discovered his treachery?"

"I came back of my own accord, of course."

"That's good. Where have you been?"

"Hiding, of course. I had a man at the door, but I didn't let him in. He may be there yet. He called himself John Story, and—"

"John Lie, it should have been!" broke in the Spaniard. "But never mind that. I thought you had run off from me just to get rid of Vijal."

"Never," answered Legare. "I would not do that, Vijal. Nick came in with a story that you had been arrested, and I went off with him. You can imagine my state of mind when I heard that story."

"Yes."

Savalli was looking at Royal Legare, and for a moment he did not speak again.

"I didn't know till last night that you had written out an account of your career."

Legare seemed to recoil from the sharp gaze of the Spaniard.

"I did not know that you had made your will," he went on.

Another start.

"I saw both last night."

"You?"

"Yes, sir. I saw the papers, I say."

"Then, you have been back to the old house?"

"There's where I saw them."

Savalli did not say that he had been prevented from seeing the contents of the papers referred to by Miss Lyra Lockwood's revolver.

Legare sat before the man from Barcelona like a guilty man. He could not avoid the eyes that were riveted upon his face.

"They were in the niche in the wall," continued the Spaniard.

Legare swallowed hard.

"I did not think you would pry around like that," he said, with a gulp.

Savalli laughed.

"Just as if I am not interested in the story of your career?" he exclaimed. "You intended that I should never see those papers."

The face of the Spaniard moved nearer to Legare's, and that worthy for a moment felt the cold black ivory of the revolver in his pocket.

"But I didn't get to read what was in the papers," suddenly cried Savalli.

Legare brightened.

"I'll tell you why I didn't," continued the man from Barcelona. "They were taken out of the niche right before my eyes, and—"

"Taken from the niche?"

"That's what I said."

"By whom?"

"Ah, you cannot guess. You cannot imagine the surprise which came over me when I saw the button touched, and the papers taken from their hiding-place."

"Who took them away, I say?"

"The girl."

"His daughter? No, she never knew where they were."

"If you mean Miss Rana Monk, she never touched them. I will settle that question in a jiffy. The other girl took them—Miss Lockwood."

Legare went back into the depths of his chair, and for a moment stared blankly at Savalli.

"The maid—the girl who is sticking to him through thick and thin?" he gasped.

"Yes, sir, and she is the coolest bit of female humanity I've ever seen."

"You saw her take the papers, you say? And what did you do, Vijal?"

"I let her walk off with them."

"I thought you were too much tiger for that."

"It's all right," grinned the Spaniard; "but when one has a revolver poked into his face he is pretty apt to let the holder of the weapon do as she pleases. That was the situation exactly. I found the girl too much for me, and as there was 'shoot' in her eyes, I had to let her get away."

Royal Legare said nothing for a minute. He seemed to feel most deeply the loss of the documents, as if they had a great bearing on his fortunes; but he was called back to the situation by the voice of Savalli.

"What if that girl should throw those papers into the hands of the police?"

"She is just devilish enough to do that."

"I don't doubt it."

"She showed last night by her manner that she is playing a desperate game for Garish Legare."

"Why didn't you follow her home? That would have disclosed his hiding-place."

"She was out of the house almost before I recovered. But she won't be very hard to find if we want her."

"What did you do with the letter you wrote to the man who holds the dagger with the hollow handle? Don't you think it time to call his attention to the bilt of that Karan?"

"That is true—the time has come for that," said Savalli, seating himself at the table and taking up a pen. "Will you dictate, Legare?"

"You know what to write as well as myself. Go on."

Royal Legare watched the Spaniard as his hand moved across the sheet of paper and when it stopped Savalli pushed his work toward his companion.

Bending over the table, he read:

"TO OFFICER GRABDEM:—"

"The hilts of some Karan daggers are hollow and unscrew. If the one you hold does so, you will find a niche at the bottom of the hilt and by pressing it with your nail, you can open the mystery."

"Yours truly,

"A KARAN EXPERT."

"That's all right," said Legare, looking up.

"That will do the work. It will enmesh him so deeply that there can be no escape. You will see that that letter falls into Officer Grabdem's hands?"

"It shall reach him forthwith, and when I have discovered the pair, the police will know where they can lay hands on him."

Savalli got up and looked down at Royal Legare.

"I'm a little short," he said.

Without a word the owner of Number Nine went to the bed and brought to light a lot of money.

"How much?"

"Enough for present needs."

Legare threw some bills upon the table and Savalli picked them up without looking at the amount.

"Wait!" cried Legare as the Spaniard turned.

"What news have you from the other girl?"

"I'll have some before night. That's certain."

"She still gives you the slip, eh?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think she may have gone to the detectives?"

"That is probable, but she will fall into our net ere long. You don't suspect that I am fool enough to let a gold mine like that elude me very long?"

"Of course not."

Savalli was at the door and the next moment he opened it.

As he passed out he looked back at Royal Legare and saw him standing in the middle of the room with his face as white as ashes and his eyes filled with a hunted look.

"The old dog is frightened!" he laughed.

"Well, I don't blame him. He's had a narrow escape."

Down on the street the disguised Spaniard passed a little man who looked back at him as he walked on.

"In new feathers, eh? Well, Savalli, you are still playing your hand," said this person, and the next moment the man from Barcelona had at his heels the ferret-like, diminutive figure of the prince of mystery-grapplers—Phineas Tripp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRIPP'S LATEST FIND.

FELIX GRABDEM, while on the police force of Gotham, had some of the qualities of a good detective, and he had been detailed by the inspector to work up the mystery of Number Nine.

In this manner the deadly dagger had been placed in his hands; but, as we know, it had mysteriously vanished, as the officer's house had been entered at night.

Felix Grabdem was one of those men who take things rather coolly, therefore he made no great

fuss over the robbery, and went to work with the additional puzzle on his hands.

It was the afternoon of the day which witnessed the events detailed in the previous chapter when the door-bell of the officer's residence rung, and as that worthy was at home, he answered the ring in person, and greeted Silas Tracer on the steps.

The best of relations, barring a little jealousy on Grabdem's part, existed between the two men; and Tracer was cordially greeted as he was escorted to the policeman's little parlor.

"You don't come very often," said Grabdem.

"Not very," answered Silas. "Fact is, we sometimes run against one another, you know."

"At work, eh? Oh, that's natural. You've heard of my misfortune?"

"The robbery? Yes; I couldn't help hearing of that, you see."

The policeman shrugged his shoulders, and for a moment sat silent, his big hands in his lap.

"It looks to me like a woman's work," he suddenly exclaimed.

"How do you make that out?"

"There happened to be some of my wife's last purchases in the room, just the thing to catch a feminine eye. They had been looked at, but were not disturbed."

"And nothing was taken but the dagger?"

"Nothing."

"Well, what do you deduce from that?"

"That the thief wanted nothing else, of course," grinned Grabdem.

"It looks that way. I would think so myself. Now, as nothing was taken but the dagger, don't you conclude that it was taken for the purpose of destroying a clue or—"

"That's just it and nothing else!" cried the policeman. "In my opinion there is but one person in the world who could profit by the theft of that blade."

"But one, eh?"

"Yes, sir—the young man who has given us the slip ever since the tragedy."

"You mean Garish Legare?"

"The very man! That fellow is the beneficiary of the theft," said Grabdem with positiveness.

"Do you think he stole from his hiding-place and burglarized the house?"

"I can't say that I do. But wait. There's the mail!"

In another moment a bunch of letters was brought into the room and laid on the table by the maid.

Felix Grabdem opened them one by one, and at one he stared for a minute, then looked up at Silas Tracer with a smile.

"Just see how unfortunately things turn up," said he. "This letter came a little too late," and he threw it on the table for Tracer to read.

Phineas Tripp's partner read it through. It was the same letter indited by Savalli in Royal Legare's apartments and posted that day for the policeman.

"Did you look for a hollow hilt?" asked Tracer.

"I did. I thought I looked good enough for it; but here are specific directions. They come too late, however. The 'Karan' has passed out of my hands."

"That is too bad."

Silas Tracer turned again to the letter which was signed "A Karan Expert," and as he looked he recalled the writing he had seen fall from the hollow hilt of the deadly dagger after Miss Lockwood had showed Phineas Tripp how to open it; and he also called to mind the letter with which they had compared that writing.

But here was a different hand. It was evident that some other person had written the instructions now on the table.

"I think we ought to work together from now on," said Felix Grabdem. "We must find the young man and solve this mystery. I believe the maid who occupied the mansion at the time of the murder—I recollect that she was young and pretty and didn't care to answer questions against him—was the young man's sweetheart. She will naturally stick to him if she cares a straw for him, and I've been thinking that we might discover something by finding her."

"You think they might not be very far apart?"

"That's it exactly. Lovers are lovers the world over, you see. I don't like to be outwitted, Tracer. I'm getting old and my professional pride increases as the years slip by."

Tracer turned again to the letter which he was reading for the fifth time.

"If this is *bona fide*, the writer evidently knows that that particular dagger had a movable hilt," he said.

"Yes."

"And he knows that something damaging is concealed therein."

"It looks that way."

"Why not trace the writer and get at his motive?"

Felix Grabdem started.

"That's a needle-in-the-haystack business," he exclaimed. "It would out-Tripp Tripp, your partner."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Tracer, with a shake of the head.

"I know that he seems to smell out mysteries; but he can't get at the writer of that letter."

"Would you mind letting me have it an hour?"

"It is yours for two hours, or even longer, Tracer," said Grabbem.

"Thanks, Felix."

Just half an hour later Silas Tracer entered the little den near Broadway and, looking at Bobbles their occasional visitor, went to the table and took a seat alongside of Tripp, the pigmy.

Tripp had just come in and his face was a deeper puzzle than ever.

Silas took from his pocket the letter which had fallen on Felix Grabbem's table and shoved it toward his friend.

"Savalli!" said the little man the moment his eyes fell upon the writing. "Did you tell Grabbem so?"

"I told him I'd let you look at it," was the reply.

"It's Savalli. Here is the letter he wrote Rana Monk in Nick Cloman's care," and Tripp placed side by side the two missives. "Don't you see what they are doing?—trying to fasten the crime on Garish Legare."

"I see it."

"It's as plain as day. I saw Savalli mail that very letter to-day. I followed him from where I believe Royal Legare is in hiding. I kept pace with him till he had mailed a letter, and this looks like the envelope."

Together they looked at the two missives and were settled in their conclusions.

"Savalli is playing a game of his own," said Tripp. "This cool-headed scoundrel from Barcelona has a wad of money, and you know, Silas, he never works for a dollar. He is bleeding Royal Legare."

"Perhaps."

"That is exactly what he is doing. I followed him down-town and he took me to a small house near the river where he is living as Perz Costello—he can't drop the Spanish, you see."

"Well?"

"I watched him till he had come out of the house. Then I went in."

"Into the house?"

"Yes. It is a small trap, quite secluded, and the lady who runs it takes in roomers without asking too many questions."

"Did you engage a room?"

"Next door to Savalli."

"Took it at once?"

"Yes. Wanted to write a letter or two, you see. Well, I didn't write any letters."

"No."

"I got into Savalli's room and looked it over. It is a nest which he doesn't seem to use very often. I found that out pretty soon."

Silas said nothing.

"There is a trunk in one corner. It yielded something."

Tracer smiled and waited for Tripp to go on.

"I found this in the trunk," and something like a steel stencil, though very small, rolled across the table till caught by Tracer's hand.

Silas picked it up, looked at it a moment and then struck the table with it. A very small impression was made and he bent over it to see what it was.

It was a small "G."

"A little blurred," said Tripp, with a smile.

"The maid told us that Garish Legare broke his stencil when he stamped the 'G' on the hilt of the dagger. You see that this 'G' is not perfect."

"I see that, Phineas."

"It's not a very strange thing to be found in Savalli's trunk. I may put it back to-night: I don't know. Grabbem is sure Garish is guilty?"

"That is his opinion."

"Just like him. But we will surprise Felix Grabbem, if our plans don't miscarry."

The boy, Bobbles, lying on a settee in the den, had caught snatches of this conversation, and when Phineas Tripp had finished, he rose and came forward.

"Would you let me see that thing—the stencil?" asked the boy.

"Certainly, Bobbles."

The boy picked it up and looked carefully at the steel object with a good deal of curiosity.

"That looks like the sort of thing old Matty was working on some nights ago."

"How many nights ago, Bobbles?"

"'Bout twenty I should say."

"Who is Matty?"

"A Jack-of-all-trades who lives not far from Number Nine."

"And you know him?"

"I know him. I was there when the man who ordered the stencil came for it."

"What was he like, Bobbles?"

"I didn't get to see much of him, but I saw enough to know that he was something of a gentleman and—"

"Rather dark of skin?"

"No, sir. He was an oldish gentleman, rather tall and had a bearing somewhat haughty."

"And he went off with the stencil?"

"Yes, sir."

Tripp and Tracer exchanged looks.

The observant boy was permitted to go back to the settee and the man-hunter sat silent a moment.

"It's a clincher," said Phineas Tripp in his quiet way.

Tracer nodded and then Tripp wrapped the stencil up.

"I shall be out to-night," said Tripp. "I may not come in till quite late, Silas. I think we shall close this trail to-morrow."

There was no reply, but the eyes of Silas Tracer met those of his companion, and it was look and look for a moment.

If Phineas Tripp had known what was fated to take place between then and the time he had mentioned; if he could have lifted the veil of the near future and looked beyond it, cool as he was, he might have recoiled from the work he had mapped out in his brain.

He swept the stencil into his pocket and took a cigar from the box on the table.

Leaning back in his chair, he soon hid himself in clouds of smoke, and Silas Tracer, watching him till he became invisible, fell into a labyrinth of speculations, all of which landed at the door of a certain man.

"To-morrow," Phineas says. "Yes, it shall be to-morrow," he mused, forgetting for the moment that a night of thrilling events might interpose itself between that hour and the dawn of another day.

"They're bosses," said Bobbles to himself. "Mebbe I've helped 'em to something!" and he fell to watching the twin ferrets of Gotham.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GLOVED HANDS.

VIJAL SAVALLI felt better.

He had found Royal Legare and had, as he thought, put the police anew on the track of Garish by means of the letter which suggested an examination of the hilt of the Karau dagger.

But there was one thing that troubled him in the midst of his secret rejoicing.

Tripp and Tracer, the ferrets, were still on the scent.

He had met the taller one face to face in the dark of Coppers's hovel, and but for little Josie's appearance, perhaps, the victory would have been his.

As it was, he had been baffled by the agile hands of Silas Tracer and had fled, leaving behind his mask and a part of his glove.

"I must turn on the pair," he said, when he walked from the room where he had left Royal Legare. "We can get back all we have lost, and, with the ferrets out of the way, win the golden game. I will yet get a wife, and the girl who has given me the slip from Nick's place will yet learn that I am not to be got rid of so easily."

It was true that Phineas Tripp had discovered that he was roosting elsewhere as Perz Costello—that he was living near the river under that name, and that he had carried in his trunk the stencil which might prove an important clue to the dark mystery of Number Nine.

Knowing nothing of Nick Cloman's arrest in the Jersey depot, Vijal Savalli mapped out his swoop.

He saw the day draw to a close, and while he perfected his plans, he did not forget to look a little for Rana, who had vanished as if she had never existed.

He was shrewd and cunning to a fault. He had roughed it in more lands than one, and what he did not know in trickery and low play was not worth knowing by any one who wanted to deal in such deadly theatricals.

While he walked the street after dark, looking up at a certain window near Broadway, news of an important nature drifted into the detectives' den.

Orall Lagone was dead at last.

The man who had written out the startling confession and who had told the ferrets about the Savalli stroke, and how the Spaniard had taught Royal Legare, lay dead in the place which he had inhabited ever since his last crime.

Orall Lagone would never witness the end of the game, and he would not know how the mystery of Number Nine was cleared up nor who won in the long struggle.

Silas Tracer heard the news with a slight start.

"I'll go down and see," said the detective, and a moment later he left the den and faced the March winds.

Perhaps the dead man had left something behind; perhaps he had left somewhere in the old room an additional clue, though the detective doubted it.

Death—the monster which he no longer feared—had come at last, and he was out of the reach of the law and beyond the scoffings of his neighbors.

Silas reached the house and walked in without knocking, for the dead cared not.

He passed into the little room where the man had lived and found a lamp burning on the table.

The boy who had fetched the news to the den had vanished and was not to be seen. He had refused to accompany the ferret to the spot, saying that he had "business" elsewhere.

Tracer saw the bent figure of a man on the grimy bed in one corner.

Taking the lamp from the table he approached the bed and held it over the form.

It was the old man—dead and cold!

His eyes stared at the ceiling and his hands were shut, as if in the last spasm of the fatal agony.

The room itself was chilly and a gust of wind as it swept into the place through the window, sent a shiver to the ferret's blood.

"He must have died alone," said Tracer as he eyed the body. "He always said the terror would come when he was alone, and that he would conquer. Well, he lived long enough to tell us about Royal Legare and his friend and to say something concerning the Savalli stroke. He confessed to having been in the mansion the night of the murder and to having found a glove at the foot of the stair. He said, too, that the glove had been dropped by Garish Legare, and that he picked it up to find that it was bloody. But he didn't hand that 'find' over to us. Did he leave it anywhere?"

Tracer looked everywhere.

He ransacked the few things Orall Lagone had left behind, only to be disappointed and to discover that at the very last the man must have destroyed his keepsakes.

He was turning away when he chanced to see something protruding from the dead man's bosom.

What had appeared a bit of dirty linen turned out to be an envelope and Tracer drew it forth.

He went to the table with it in his grasp and tore it open in the lamplight.

Three things dropped out—a sheet of paper, a glove, and a ring.

They separated as they touched the table and the detective looked at them with a smile.

The glove had dark stains which seemed to have eaten through it; but the ring was bright, and the diamond set shone with unwonted luster.

Tracer brushed them aside with a glance and turned to the sheet of paper which he opened.

It was written over, and seemed to have given the writer some care of composition.

"The last message," said the detective, as he read. "It is as a voice from the dead. The glove is the one he found at the foot of the stairs that night and the ring was in it."

Orall Lagone had left the three things for the detectives, and by chance they had fallen into the right hands.

He had penned the last words with the seal of death on his brow, and the cold chill creeping toward his heart, stilling its pulsations forever and sending him at last before the Great Judge.

There was but little in the paper which added to the confession already obtained of the dead man. He wrote simply that the glove and the ring were souvenirs of the Mystery of Number Nine, and after that he bade Tripp and Tracer good-by, thanking the former for his kindness in the past, and not forgetting to call attention to the Savalli stroke.

Silas Tracer poked the letter away in an inner pocket, and transferred the glove and the ring to a place just as safe.

Then he went back to the dead and crossed the hands, and put the uncouth pillow underneath the head.

This done, he stole toward the door and looked back from the portal.

All at once something which, until then, had escaped his eye attracted his attention and he crossed the room once more.

Something which glittered on the floor at the foot of the couch waited for him to pick it up which he did.

Evidently it had fallen from Orall Lagone's hand, and had rolled half-way under the bed.

It was a portrait, the picture of a woman's face, and as the detective looked at it he started and then smiled.

"It looks like Josie's face, though it is the picture of a woman full grown. Josie is a waif whom Coppers picked up on the street and—Hello! the back of the case opens."

Sure enough the back of the case inclosing the picture did open, and in a moment it was in the ferret's hands.

A little piece of paper fluttered out as he turned the shell, and dropped at his feet.

Pouncing upon it he stepped to the light and read:

"MARRIED, June 11th, 187—,

ORALL LAGONE

TO

MISS JOSEPHINE TIRESON.

Little 'Josie' born, — — —.

Stolen, May 3d, 187—."

No wonder Tracer read with interest, and with eyes that seemed to bulge from his head.

He looked at the picture again.

The face looked more and more like little Josie's.

Could it be that he had discovered another secret which until then Orall Lagone had kept with the pertinacity of the oath-bound?

He turned the case over and over, but it gave

him no more secrets. He held the paper between him and the light, but it told him nothing more.

"I'll keep this, too," said the detective. "I'll find out something more, Orall Lagone, and if you are Josie's father, she may never know the secret with which you died."

Silas Tracer turned from the house at last.

As he stepped into the alley-like street, for Winesap Alley was rightly named, he heard a soft, quick step behind him.

It was like the sudden tread of an eager tiger and the ferret wheeled just as something fell against him.

He had been attacked and by enemy as supple as a panther.

They went to the wall together and the detective was borne back toward the dead burglar's house, and falling against the door, found himself thrown inside and flat on the floor with a pair of hands at his throat.

This attack came with the force of a whirlwind and he could not see the features of his antagonist although they almost touched his own.

It was to be another fight for life and in that old house where the hidden wretch had died.

Tracer grappled the man and tussled with him on the floor, now rolling almost to the couch where lay the cold body of Orall Lagone.

At last he felt a hand sink as it were in his very windpipe.

It was soft, but terrible; it had a grip of iron and a force of terrible power, closing like a vise as it sunk deeper and deeper, shutting off his wind and depriving him of hope.

Not a word fell from the lips of either man.

They fought on with the energy of tigers in a death-grapple in their native jungles; they tore at each other's throats and tried to outwit one another in the death-grapple.

Silas Tracer felt that hand as it closed on his throat, breaking the force of his own power, until he believed that he had reached the end of his life trail.

There was no mercy in the hand—none in the knees which rested on his breast and seemed to bury themselves there.

He gave up the struggle.

He had to relinquish his grip and it fell from the arms he had tried to hold in check as he dropped back in the effort and felt his brain whirl in the darkness of death.

The end had come so far as consciousness was concerned.

Phineas Tripp's partner had passed from the track of life to the mystic trail of the dead; he had encountered the only enemy he had never vanquished; and his hands, opening as they fell from the enemy's arms, or were rudely shaken off, as the Unknown rose, lay motionless on the floor.

The man who walked from the old house had a wicked gleam in his eyes.

He looked back as he drew the door gently to, and then struck the street at the mouth of Winesap Alley.

There was seen for a moment a face, dark and handsome. Hands which hung at the man's side were gloved and graceful, almost feminine in their cast; and as he hurried off he smiled to himself.

Half a square from the alley he turned into a saloon and walked down the long polished counter to the furthest end.

Nodding to the waiter to follow him, he went to a stall at the end of the room and pulled the curtains when he had given his order.

With the glass before him, he looked at the curtains and then ran his hands into his pockets.

From one he brought a locket-like case with a woman's face in it; from the other a glove, a ring, and a letter!

"A good haul, but it took work. He was as wiry as a cat," he said, looking at them. "He nearly had me once; but I got it back on him and finished the game."

He laughed, put the articles back in his pockets, and sipped his wine.

It was Vijal Savalli.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLEVER AND COOL.

OLSEN BROMANN, the first mate of the ill-fated Crusader, found but few who were ready to believe his story about the infernal machine.

The mate, as he rested from the excitement of that terrible night on the ocean, wondered what had become of the man who had taken off the piece of wheel which he had found in the wood upon which he floated after the shipwreck till rescued by the Jennie King.

He regretted having given it to any one, and now that he had parted with it, he was inclined to believe that he had parted with the only proof of his story which he had brought back from the tropics.

Bromann was seated in his little room on the same night of the events just narrated, and the clock was on the stroke of ten.

He had taken possession of a cheap back room in a quiet house, where he seemed as much out of the way as if he were sleeping beneath the waters of the sea.

He was not that kind of man to seek notoriety, but when he believed a thing he did so with all his might, and thus it was that he believed

that what he heard in Royal Legare's state-room was the infernal machine which had sent the Crusader to the bottom of the sea.

Perhaps Olsen Bromann, strong of limb and broad of shoulder, as a mate should be, was revolving the incidents of the last voyage in his mind when he heard a rap at the door.

The man who had carried off the broken wheel might have come back.

The door was locked, but the mate opened it and a man with a supple body came in.

Bromann looked twice at him ere he invited him to a seat, and when he sat down the mate noticed that he looked toward the door and then at the table as if mentally calculating something in his mind.

"You are Mate Bromann, I believe?" said the sailor's visitor.

"I am, and I came near not being here to tell you that."

"So I see by the newspapers. They gave you a splendid send-off, didn't they?"

"Yes—more than I wanted. I was glad to escape with my life and the wonder is that I am here."

The other one nodded.

"It must have been a tough case," said he.

"Tough?" Olsen bared his arm and showed his visitor a long cut extending from wrist to elbow.

"I got that on the spar—got it by the teeth of that little wheel which I found in the wood."

"Oh, you found a little wheel in the wood of the spar, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it come there? I ask because I have sailed a little in my life, and I wasn't aware that spars carry little wheels—"

"They don't, bless your life. They never do, but this one happened to have a burden of that kind."

"Oh, an accident, I see."

"Just so, and it was the cause of a greater one."

"The little wheel?"

"The little wheel."

"I don't understand you."

"They have laughed at me—the reporters have—but I am here to stick to my tale that the Crusader went to the bottom because of an infernal machine which some devil placed in one of the state-rooms."

"That's a pretty sensational charge, Mr. Bromann."

"I know that, but by Jove! I believe it."

"You may be getting somebody into deep water."

"Can't help it. The deeper the better, if he is guilty."

"Of course. Where is the wheel?"

Bromann was stumped.

He had given it to the detective, and could not say what that party had done with it. He looked at his visitor trying to frame a reply to his question, and saw that his keen eyes were riveted upon him.

"Didn't you fetch that wheel home with you?" he asked.

"I did, sir."

"I expect you don't mind showing it?"

"I don't; but—but—really I have parted with it for a spell."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. I gave it to a gentleman who was interested in my story."

"Did you place it in the hands of the police?"

"I gave it to a detective."

"Oh, you got him to take stock in your story. I understand that you connect the name of one of the Crusader's passengers with the strange noises you heard in the state-room."

For a moment Olsen Bromann looked aghast at his caller who was leaning toward him with his eyes looking him through, as it were, and with his hands resting carelessly on the edge of the table.

"God help me, I couldn't do otherwise for it was very suspicious," said the mate.

"Do you mean to say that Royal Legare wasn't on board the Crusader the night of the explosion, if there was one?"

Bromann colored at this and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I say it!" and he shut his hands. "I'd say it if I was on my death-bed. Royal Legare never sailed with us. I was going to mention the fact to the captain; but he was a little off and I thought I would wait till he got over it. But I waited too long. The explosion came and presto! we were in the water."

"Look here; don't you know that you won't gain any friends by telling such stories as these?"

"Where is Royal Legare? That's what you will be putting at me next? Look here, sir. I am Olsen Bromann and I am old enough to have opinions of my own. I have been out a little since coming back to New York. I haven't been housed up here all the time. Why, sir, I have seen Royal Legare."

"What's that?"

"I have seen Royal Legare!" repeated Bromann. "How do I know him so well? Why, sir, every time he came down to the ship while we lay here I saw him, and he ain't a man to be forgotten in a night."

"Where did you see him?"

"His face was at the window and I nearly fell through the sidewalk when I caught sight of it."

"That's bolder yet. Here you insinuate that the Crusader was sunk by an infernal machine, and you connect the name of a respected citizen of New York with it."

Olsen Bromann reached into a handy drawer and pulled out several papers of back dates.

"Well, he's respected enough to have two murders in his house, I see," he said, with an aggravating grin. "Look! here they are, sir—first an old man and then a burglar, found dead before Royal Legare's safe. But you've seen the account, sir—of course you have. Respected? He may be that, but all the same the sound of wheels came from his state-room just before the Crusader stepped off the shipping list."

There was in Bromann's mien a bull-doggishness which is often seen in men of his stripe, and as he fell back in his chair showing his ample chest to his visitor, he looked triumphant and to be feared.

"You don't believe it?" said Bromann after a short pause.

"I don't want to."

"Did you know Royal Legare?"

"Yes."

"And you think he isn't in the city now?"

"He would show up to me if he were here."

"Well, he isn't under the water unless he threw himself from one of the docks since I saw him at the window."

"When are you going to sea?" asked the mate's caller.

"I don't know—maybe never. I've got nearly enough of it. Three times shipwrecked and twice overboard. The last time was the closest call. This is getting to be an age of invention and one don't know when he is sailing over a piece of clock-work which is liable to send him to Neptune at any time."

Bromann's visitor stood up and looked again toward the door.

He was not the mate's equal in strength, but, there was a suppleness in his body which did not escape Olsen Bromann's gaze.

The man was dangerous.

"If you could only show me where you saw Royal Legare, I will pay you well. Was it after night?"

"No, sir, it was broad daylight."

"Would you mind telling me where it was, or, better still, show me the place?"

"Who are you?"

"A man who wants to find Royal Legare, if he is still alive."

"His enemy?"

"No, his friend. I will pay you, sir—"

"I don't care to go out just now."

"Not for something which will keep you in luxury all summer?"

"I've got enough for that."

"You don't know anything against Legare! Olsen Bromann, you are simply posing for notoriety: you never found a broken wheel on the spar; you—"

"What's that?"

The burly mate was on his feet in an instant; his figure came round the table, but fell back as a revolver gleamed in the light of the jet.

"One step and I'll take you off the shipping-list, too!" coolly uttered the supple man, as his eyes looked over the revolver-barrel into the astonished face of the Crusader's mate.

Olsen Bromann, brought to bay in this summary manner, felt a chill sweep through his heated blood; he faced the cool-head, and bit his lips as he realized that he had been caught by a clever play.

"What are you going to do about that wheel?" asked the stranger.

"It has passed beyond my hands."

"So you have told me. Well, go back to the table."

The big mate hesitated.

"Sit down!" commanded the man with the pistol.

There was something in the speaker's eyes which Bromann obeyed instead of the words.

He dropped back into the chair.

"You've got paper in the drawer, haven't you?"

"I guess I have."

"Take it out. There are pens and ink at your elbow. You will write a retraction of your statements."

"What?"

"You will write that the story of the infernal machine was all an invention of your own."

"But—"

The stranger took a step toward Bromann's table and the revolver swooped an inch nearer.

"In the devil's name, who are you, anyhow?" gasped the mate.

"Never mind. Go to work!"

The mate had spread a sheet before him, and in another moment the cool-head was dictating and he was putting the words down as fast as he could.

"Now, read what you have there."

"I, Olsen Bromann, late mate of the Crusader, lost at sea on the 12th of March, do solemnly say that the story I have circulated about there being

an infernal machine on board at the time of the shipwreck was spun out of whole cloth for a purpose, and that I know that Royal Legare sailed in the vessel and was with us at the time of the misfortune.

"I do further say that the piece of wheel which I had exhibited to some parties was a hoax, calculated to strengthen my story; and all this I swear to of my own free will and I hope to be forgiven my despicable acts.

"OLSEN BROMANN, *Mate.*"

"That will do. Now let me have the paper, please."

A gloved hand was put out and the writing was scraped from the table.

"You will stick to this story from now on, Mr. Bromann," said the man. "It will be to your interest to confirm it on every occasion, and you will prosper only so long as you do so."

The revolver did not relax its menace till its possessor was at the door.

Olsen Bromann sat like one held spellbound by a terror until the door had closed on the handsome demon, and even then he sat like a statue.

"Where is he?" he cried at last, springing up and crossing the room at a bound. "I'll wring his neck and rob him," and he threw open the door and looked out.

Will you wring his neck, Mate Bromann?

Go back. You have seen Vijal Savalli for the last time.

You will never wring the neck of "the man from Barcelona."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COOLEST MAN IN NEW YORK.

PHINEAS TRIPP, the little detective, had told Silas Tracer that "to-morrow" he expected to see the end of the trail connected with Number Nine.

What he was bent on doing was unknown even to his shrewd partner, and when he parted with Silas that worthy saw him walk out of the den with mental assurances that he would win the game at which he played.

Phineas Tripp always won.

There were times when he seemed to be "at sea," but, as Silas used to say he always got to shore safely and when he did, he generally had a prize in tow.

Phineas, hastening from the den while Silas was on his way to investigate the death of Orall Lagone, drew his coat around his chin pointed like a hawk's beak, and breasted the March breeze.

This breeze came up with a vengeance from the Battery, and caused the pigmy ferret to hasten his steps a little.

He knew exactly whither lay his path that night, and after a long walk in which he appeared to cross a part of the city which lay below Union Square, he drew up in front of a house, the upper windows of which he watched for a moment with appreciative glances.

"I wonder if I will find the fox at home?" muttered the detective, as he approached the house and opened the lower door with a pass-key.

He let himself into a hall rather dark, and as he did so a woman's face appeared at a door.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Sharpless?" she said, as she smiled. "You come in early."

"I'm tired," said Phineas.

He passed up the steps and entered a room near the head of the flight.

He was in the house to which he had tracked Vijal Savalli as Perz Costello, and in the very next room to the one occupied by that man when not playing the game under his real name.

It was not very late and the house was still when the ferret entered.

As he shut the door he did not turn on the gas but remained in the dark.

Phineas Tripp had been there before. As he had told his partner of the trail, he had taken up lodgings in that room for the purpose of carrying out a plan which had entered his brain like an inspiration.

Cool as he was, he knew that he was dealing with a man equally cool.

He never got very deep into a case without knowing with what sort of people he would be likely to deal, nor against what sort of hands he would have to deal his cards.

Link by link he and Tracer had picked up the chain of guilt.

Now a link from Rana, now one from Orall Lagone and another from Mate Bromann, and even from Bobbles.

The chain was nearly finished.

As the moments passed, with the little ferret in the room of the house near the river, the clocks of Gotham ticked off a thousand lives and yet Phineas Tripp waited for the one who did not come.

The wall before him was all that separated him from Savalli's nest.

He had entered it and discovered the stencil in the trunk; he had carried it off, another link in the chain; and Bobbles had said that a handsome man had had "Matty," the tinker, make it for him.

It was evident from Bobbles's description of the customer that it had not been Savalli; but it

was not strange that the stencil should be found in the Spaniard's trunk.

The customer was Royal Legare—the man who had learned the Savalli stroke of its inventor. He was the man who had purchased the stencil which was capable of making a "G" on the black hilt of a Karan dagger.

By and by a footstep came up the steps. It caught Tripp's ears and his eyes glittered anew.

As he leaned toward his fastened door without the slightest noise, he heard a key thrust into a lock and a door swung open.

It was the portal of the adjoining room. Evidently "Perz Costello" had come in.

Phineas Tripp turned to the wall which separated the two apartments and glued his eye to a hole which he had adroitly prepared during the moments of his vigil.

The man was before him. Standing in the light of the jet which he had turned on, was the man from Barcelona, as supple as ever, with a proud smile of triumph on his lips.

Savalli threw his hat to the floor and revealed the dark forehead over which fell a strand of the dark curled locks which made him prominent wherever his face was seen.

There had been a time when those locks were shorn; but they had regained their wonted splendor and once more adorned his head.

Phineas could not help looking at this man as he showed himself to him in the quietude of his room.

All at once Savalli turned to the table and tumbled something out upon it.

The watchful detective started. He saw three things.

He saw a glove, a ring, and a letter.

Then something else followed these things and a locket lay alongside the glove.

The Spaniard's drag-net had caught something.

Savalli took a seat at the table, but first he saw that a fire was burning in the grate.

He picked up the objects one at a time and went over them carefully.

He began with the glove and ended with the locket.

The distance was too great for Phineas Tripp to see the face in the locket, but he thought: "I will know what that face looks like before I'm through with you, Savalli."

Suddenly the rascal tossed the letter toward the grate and it fell into the fire.

He grinned like a devil as he watched it burn.

The other things he carried across the room and stooped over the trunk in which Phineas had found the stencil. He seemed to bury them in the depths of the old trunk, and then rose, locking the receptacle ere he turned away.

"I've got him now. I've got him there at last, beyond escape!" cried the man from Barcelona as he held out his hand and clinched it as if he were crushing something there. "Let him run away again—let him take stock of such a rascal as Nicholas Cloman, and I will show him what I can do!"

He finished with a laugh and picked up his hat.

Phineas Tripp saw him quit the room, locking the door after him.

Half-way down the stairs Savalli stopped and the little detective heard him talking with a woman.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Costello?" said the voice. "I thought you were the other gentleman who took the room next to you. He came in awhile ago—"

"The room next mine?" interrupted Savalli.

"Yes, sir."

"When did he take it?"

"Only to-day."

Savalli went on down.

"What was he like? And you say he is in there?"

"He is a small man, and his name he said is Sharpless."

All this Phineas Tripp heard with his hand at the door and his ear taking in every sound that came up to warn him that danger impended.

Presently footsteps came back up the flight.

Phineas could hear them creaking the old steps, and he counted Savalli's advance foot by foot.

"Which door did you say, madame? The one on my right?"

"Yes, sir."

The footsteps stopped at the door of his room, and the detective drew back.

The crisis had come.

In a few seconds he would stand face to face with the man from Barcelona, the man who had mastered more than one enemy, and whose hand was deep in the crime of Number Nine.

Not a sound broke the deathly silence in the ferret's room.

Phineas at the door, but not so close to it as to be struck by it, should Savalli attempt a *coup* by breaking it down, his shoulder for a battering-ram, stood like a statue with his feet firmly planted and his eyes on the alert.

All at once a knock sounded on the portal.

"Do you know the gentleman—Mr. Sharpless?" called the woman from below.

"Of course I know him, madame. He's an old friend of mine, and I want to see him."

"But he may have gone out."

"Are you sure he did?"

"I heard some one come down-stairs after he went up."

"But you thought I was he."

"So I did."

Savalli turned to the door again, but did not knock.

"Oh, I remember now. He did go out," said the woman, much to the detective's relief. "I recall now that he said he was sorry for disturbing me, and so on. Pardon my forgetfulness, Mr. Costello, and—"

"Curse you women! you are constantly putting us to a peck of trouble. Well, I'll follow Mr. Sharpless's example."

The man from Barcelona went down the steps. Phineas heard him talking to the woman for a moment and then the door opened and shut on his figure.

"That was a narrow play, thanks to the woman," thought the little ferret.

He waited a minute and then opened the door. He stepped into the hall and went down-stairs.

"I—I don't like that man, nor the way he looked when I told him that you had taken the other room," said the creature who awaited him at the bottom of the flight. "Did I do right, Mr. Sharpless?"

"Exactly right, madame. Here," and he placed a dollar in the hand which came out at the glance of his eye. "If he comes in again will you please hold him here?"

"That I will!"

Phineas Tripp went back.

He opened the door of Savalli's room and went straight to the trunk in the corner. It had yielded him something on a previous visit, and now he expected it to yield something more.

Opening it, he dived his hand into its depths and began to search them.

He found what he was looking for, a packet in which were concealed a locket, a glove and a ring, and with these in his bosom, he rose from the hunt.

Triumph lit up the eyes of Phineas Tripp.

He recalled his last words to Silas Tracer.

He would keep them by ending the hunt "to-morrow."

He felt that the woman of the house was on duty below, thanks to the dollar, and as he turned from the trunk he caught sight of some ashes of burned paper on the hearth.

Savalli had thrown into the fire the paper which he had brought to his nest and a part of it was still unconsumed.

The pigmy ferret sprang forward and stooped over the fragments.

He had no idea that it was a part of the last writing of Orall Lagone, nor that Silas Tracer had felt the deadly hand of the man who had consigned the document to the flames.

Savalli had not been sharp enough for him.

As Tripp, the tracker, picked up the charred paper, he heard a door open.

It sounded below, but thinking of what the woman had promised him he looked carefully at the paper.

It contained but two words and they were a name—Orall Lagone.

"Where did he get this?" mentally asked Phineas Tripp.

At that moment the door of the chamber flew open and on the threshold stood the coolest man in New York, Vijal Savalli.

"Caught at last, fox?" cried the Spaniard, as a revolver covered Phineas Tripp. "You are going to die in your tracks!"

CHAPTER XXX.

TRACER HITS THE MARK.

IN another part of the city and amid darkness which seemed palpable, a man who had been "down the deep, dark valley" was struggling back to life.

This was Silas Tracer, who had felt at his throat the hands of Vijal Savalli in the house of Orall Lagone.

It seemed that a week had passed since the struggle with the man from Barcelona; but, in fact, very few minutes had elapsed, but the silken-fingered rascal was gone.

Tracer, with his mind confused, though one by one the events of the night came back to him, staggered to his feet and found a match.

The light fell upon the stiffened figure of Orall Lagone, but upon nothing more.

He felt in his pockets for the articles which his visit had yielded him, but they were not to be found.

"Of course he robbed me, believing me dead," he said with a grin. "Well, I might as well have been dead, after feeling those infernal fingers. Why, they seemed to meet in my windpipe, and I half believe they did."

He put up his hand and felt his throat. It seemed to surprise him that it was still there and not wrenched away by the demon grip of Vijal.

"Let me see. What shall the first move be?"

He answered this question by quitting the place.

He pushed along the street, under the lamps,

crossing now and then, and keeping in the shadows as much as possible, until he turned up in another part of the city.

"Probably he took the spoils to his partner in crime," said Silas as he stopped, and from the sidewalk contemplated a house which reared itself for four stories before him.

"The window is dark, but that signifies nothing. Savalli is a night owl, and the man who is up there once more, according to Nick Cloman, may be waiting for him. And what if Tripp should blunder and Savalli sound the alarm? Pshaw! Phineas never blunders. What am I talking about?"

But he went nearer the house. It was tall and evidently full of rooms. It had a common hallway and he stepped into it.

"Nick has given me the number of the door and, strange to say, it is Number Nine—a fatal number in that man's career."

He pushed up the steps which sent out no sound, for he stepped lightly, and at a door upon which was just discernible a figure "9," he paused and smiled to himself.

"He'd open to Savalli," said Silas. "But to me, if he knew I was here, he'd keep that door locked till doomsday."

So he rapped lightly after awhile and listened. Footsteps crossed the floor beyond. He heard a voice at the door—a voice he had not heard in a long time.

It was not Savalli's voice; he had heard that.

"Who is there?"

"Vijal!" answered the detective, disguising his voice.

He drew back a pace as a key turned in the lock, and then the door opened.

As it opened enough to admit him, Silas Tracer slipped into the room.

A very dim light was burning and he saw that the face before him was Royal Legare's.

"I thought you might come, I—"

The speaker's hand had enlarged the dot of flame, and then he paused as he retreated from the table and stared at the man whose face his action had revealed.

It was not Savalli.

No, it was not the man from Barcelona, and Royal Legare, in the terror of the moment, lost every vestige of color as he looked and seemed to read in the calm, cool look of his visitor his own doom.

"Don't do that. You might fail, and then—"

Tracer's hand had caught the arm of the startled man and thrown it down, for the hand was lifting a revolver; and standing before Legare, he watched him with a smile.

"You thought I was Savalli?" he said.

"I?"

"That's why you let me in. If you could have looked through the door, I might be standing there yet."

There was no reply, but Legare's eyes wandered to the door and he watched for a moment, as if he wanted to see it open to admit the man who had not come.

Silas took the weapon from the now nerveless hand and led the man to a chair at the table.

"It's a late call," said he. "A very late one, but you will pardon me. You don't look much like a man who is at the bottom of the sea."

Royal Legare's eyes twinkled for a second, and he seemed to smile in spite of himself.

"Did you come here to tell me that?" he asked.

"Not exactly."

"Who are you?"

Why did he ask this question? He had guessed that the visitor was a bird of evil omen—a fox of the streets—a man who had come to him with evil and judgment in his brown hands.

"You let yourself be robbed by a sharp," said Tracer.

"How?"

"You let Nick Cloman, a bird of evil passage, beat you out of three thousand dollars."

Legare started.

"Where were you?" he cried.

"Where I saw the robbery committed. Do you know what has become of your night-hawk?"

"No."

"Well, he jumped into the river—"

"Good!" and Legare laughed.

"But we fished him out," added Silas, and the listener's countenance fell. "Yes, Royal Legare, we got him out and he is now where he can't repeat the foolish act."

"You have arrested him?"

"We have the landlord of the Dove-cote. Royal Legare, did you ever see anything like this?"

Something that had a yellow look fell upon the table at the watcher's hand, and he fell back at sight of it.

It was the only thing which Savalli had overlooked when he robbed his enemy in Orall Lagone's hovel—a piece of brass wheel with little cogs which had been worn.

Legare at first turned pale and then reached out to pick up the bit of brass, but the hand of Silas Tracer interposed.

"It came back from the sea—it was found by the only man who escaped the destruction of the Crusader."

"I never saw it before. What is it—a piece of a wheel?"

"Yes, the one old Peter made—for Royal Legare!"

There was a quick start and the eyes of the two men met.

Legare relapsed into stubborn silence and Silas Tracer, after regarding him for a moment, said coolly:

"Very well. You don't know it—never saw it before, eh?"

"Never, sir."

"Then, you were lost at sea?"

"You ought to see that I was not."

"But you took passage on the Crusader."

"I did not sail with her. I changed my mind at the last moment. I had business which kept me in the city—business which proved lucky for me."

"That's according to the way things pan out," remarked Tracer. "I don't think I'd call it a lucky adventure if I were you, Mr. Legare. The tragedy happened while you were supposed to be on the Crusader."

"Yes, sir. If you refer to the unfortunate affair which took place in Number Nine—"

"That's the one. I mean the first of the two crimes took place while you were supposed to be on the sea."

"That is true, sir. It happened at a time when I was compelled to hide from a creditor—I will keep nothing back since you have unearthed me—and but for circumstances by which I was surrounded, I would have come forth and met all of you."

"We wished often that you were at our elbows, for we have had trouble picking up the links connected with your adopted son's habits."

"That was an unfortunate affair. He was drifting to it. I saw that months ago. I tried to reclaim him—offered him all that a father can offer his own child; but the two evils—you must know of them, sir—had taken such hold on him, that he was like a man hung in chains—utterly helpless!"

Royal Legare's voice grew stronger as he advanced.

He even smiled as he went on, and Silas Tracer, looking across the table, watched him with interest.

"We found the dagger-sheath on the floor of his room, you know."

"The papers have told me that."

"We found the blood-smears, too."

"Yes."

"Then, you see, he must have washed his hands in the basin, after which he made his escape from the house."

"I believe it is thought that he must have even robbed the poor wretch who was left dead in the room."

"Yes, sir. Such is the supposition."

"Why, every link seems complete," said Legare.

What was he thinking about just then? After all, the detectives did not suspect him, but they were still after Garish. They were enmeshing him, and this one—Silas Tracer—was on the same trail, after all his cunning and nerve.

"Can't you trace him?" asked Legare.

"We will find him in time. The maid—Miss Lockwood, you know—has turned up missing."

"Find her and catch the young man."

"You reason well, Legare. You would make a good detective."

It was a grim smile which for a moment overspread Royal Legare's face.

Tracer bent once more toward the table, and this time his eyes appeared to change color.

"We want a little information on a certain point," said Silas. "I have sought you out for this purpose."

"Go on. While I am sorry to be used in any manner against one whom my roof has sheltered and for whom I have entertained the most fatherly feelings, yet I will not keep you from the ends of justice."

"I would like to know who entered the house at ten o'clock that night, who went up-stairs and stopped for a moment at the top of the flight, who pulled on a pair of gloves in the hall above, and in doing so dropped the end of a glove cord; who then went down and entered the room where Marcus Monk was writing at the table. I want to know who crept up behind the old man with the tread of a panther, who held over his head a moment a dagger, the handle of which was black and hollow; I want to know whose arms swooped down over the old man's head; and, going back for a moment, I want to know who sent to Marcus Monk's room at the Dove-cote, the paper folded so as to show him, first of all, the advertisement which told him that you wanted a three months' tenant."

Royal Legare said nothing, and in the detective's pause his breath might have been heard as it came forth in gasps.

"Who dropped the glove at the foot of the stairs after the killing? There were two gloves dropped—one was found by Miss Lockwood and burned, the other fell into the hands of Orall Lagone."

There was a start this time.

The name was like a revelation from the dead.

"Orall Lagone?" cried Legare.

"The companion of your early days—the young man who met you in London and who went with you across the Continent, with Marcus Monk at your heels. He was in the house that night. He came thither to see his old friend—the man who led him into crime and wrecked his career. He was out in the hall yonder when a man came from the fatal room. He picked up a dropped glove. There was a ring in it—a gold ring with a diamond setting; and as he looked at it—the ring, I mean—his thoughts went back across the water, and he saw you standing at the counter of a jeweler's shop in Barcelona bargaining for a ring just like it."

The ferret's last word was followed by a sharp cry, and he saw Royal Legare standing erect with the nails of his hands buried like eagle talons in his own forehead.

"I didn't miss my mark," muttered Silas Tracer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

"CAUGHT at last, fox! You are going to die in your tracks."

Phineas Tripp, facing Vijal Savalli in the room occupied by the Spaniard on the quiet street, looked into the muzzle of the outstretched revolver and felt that he was dealing with a desperate cool-head.

Savalli had come back, and the woman below either had not held him in check according to her promise, or she had deliberately betrayed the little detective.

It was one way or the other.

For a moment the man from Barcelona watched the detective out of his sharp, dark eyes and then stepped forward.

"Don't you know that this is the last game of your life, for you don't expect this hand of Savalli—you know me, I see—to spare you now?"

Phineas Tripp seemed to smile, but it was a smile of coolness which told his enemy that he was not losing any nerve over the situation.

"It is true. Why should you spare me?" he asked.

"You and your partner have bounded me these ten days and you have interposed your hand whenever you could."

"On the side of justice," said Phineas.

"Never mind on which side, though I know you have not made a play in my behalf."

"Why should we, Savalli?"

The listener seemed to start slightly at the mention of his name, as if it had come to him straight from the bench of a court.

"I give you one minute. The woman downstairs tried to stop me. She had the unblushing coolness to step before me, but I guess she won't try that game again, not at your bidding, at any rate."

"You choked her, then?"

"That's exactly what I did, and I know how to do that," grinned Savalli.

Phineas Tripp knew this from what Tracer had told him about the struggle in the dark in Coppers's house. He had to look for a moment at Savalli's hands, to see how soft and silken they were, and then to glance at the calm face and note that resolution was stamped in every lineament.

"I will count," continued Savalli. "I will count three and at the last one you will quit this game."

There was no reply.

Phineas Tripp had never been trapped quite so cleverly before.

He had run down more than one quarry and now and then he had fallen into traps; but never into one which threatened to prove so swiftly deadly.

"One!"

The word fell clear and distinct from Vijal Savalli's lips.

Phineas seemed to draw one shoulder up and to look across the space and eye his foe without a break of countenance.

The man from Barcelona watched his antagonist and with the unquivering weapon in his hand, walked forward until the muzzle of the deadly thing was almost at the little ferret's forehead.

"Two! Don't you intend to say something which may intercede for your soul at the gates of the Unknown?"

No answer.

Savalli took a long breath. Phineas Tripp saw the fingers at the pistol get a new hold and the eyes above it got a deadlier glitter.

There was no mercy in them, and Savalli was not the person to spare an enemy so neatly caught and so deadly to his cause.

All at once a little body went forward like a missile hurled from a catapult.

It landed under the revolver which one hand knocked toward the ceiling and as Savalli fell back with a startled cry, he saw that a six-shooter as large as the one he held was looking into his face with as deadly a prospect.

It was the work of the fraction of a second and the tables had been turned even while the third and last number was trembling on his tongue.

Beaten! Beaten, and behind the revolver

gleamed the eyes of the solver of crimson puzzles—the greatest little man in Gotham.

No wonder Vijal Savalli wished at that moment that he had killed the ferret without a moment's warning.

No wonder he bit his thin lip through till blood trickled down his chin and reddened it, as he looked, first into the revolver and then over it at the cool face of the ferret Sphinx.

"You will do one of two things, Savalli," said Phineas, seeing that the Spaniard still gripped the weapon which had been knocked aside by his unexpected *coup*. "You will either throw the pistol toward your trunk in yon corner, or drop dead in your tracks."

"You wouldn't kill me, Phineas Tripp. I'm worth too much to you just now."

"Your death, with what we know, would not cheat the law out of very much," was the reply. "It would, in fact, save the courts some trouble."

"But you couldn't prove anything against the man you really want."

Phineas smiled as if he caught the drift of the fellow's words.

"You can't hang the boy without Savalli's testimony?"

"The boy? What boy, sir?"

"Why, the one who did it that night—Garish Legare, the young gambler."

"We'll get along without your testimony when the time comes. Just now I have asked you to throw your revolver into yon corner, and I shall not ask again."

A quick, spasmodic movement sent the weapon toward the trunk, and it fell there with a dull sound.

"Now, sir, what next?" asked Savalli, leaning toward Phineas with a wicked leer in his eyes. "You seem to be running things just now, and all because of your little *coup*. What next, I say?"

"About face and down the stairs."

Savalli turned with a promptness which surprised the ferret.

He had left the door open, and as he stepped into the hall, he seemed to take hope.

Down the stairs he went, watched by Phineas Tripp, as he knew that his man was the incarnation of cool rage, and that he was apt to play some hand before he reached the street.

Midway down the flight, Savalli fell against the wall and looked up at Phineas.

The little detective was so near that he came to a sudden stop with the light burning in the hall below, but dimly lighting up the scene.

One of Savalli's hands was half hidden in his bosom, and suddenly it vanished altogether.

Vijal Savalli was endowed with long arms.

More than once had Phineas noticed this, and he saw how one of them could have swooped down upon Coppers when on the floor in front of the steel safe, while the other drove to his heart the sharp, needle-like blade of the Karan.

For Savalli to stop on the staircase was to make the last desperate struggle against fate.

Phineas Tripp saw this as he drew back, but the next second with the upward spring of the tiger, Savalli came at him, a knife in his right hand and the long arms sending the blade toward his breast.

Phineas Tripp threw up the revolver and saw the barrel clutched by the gloved left hand of the Barcelonian fiend, then, as he tripped and fell with his back striking one of the sharp-edged steps, he pressed the trigger and the space was filled with a report which seemed to stun him.

He fell back while something rolled to the bottom of the staircase. He wondered what had been the result of his shot and whether the blade of the Spaniard had not found a portion of his own anatomy.

With his brain confused by the brief struggle and the shot, the pigmy ferret picked himself up and ventured to look below.

A dark figure was lying on the floor doubled up and silent.

He had killed Savalli!

Recovering, the detective with cocked revolver went down and bent over the object there.

It was the body of a woman.

Instead of being the body of Vijal Savalli, his quarry he was looking into the face of the housekeeper—the creature whom Savalli had boasted of choking.

The Spaniard was nowhere to be seen.

Little Tripp stood for a moment nonplused by this sudden escape. He tried to speculate how Savalli could have left the house, as he had seen his body roll down the flight; but when he came to think of it, there might have been half a minute of semi-unconsciousness on his part and the smoke of the revolver had obscured the scene.

But Savalli was gone.

Tripp raised the woman and bore the body into an adjoining chamber.

She would come back to life—in fact, she was on the edge of recovery then, and leaving her on a settee, he turned and went back to the hall.

Savalli should not escape him now that he had by luck and good fortune been enabled to get away.

He would warn Royal Legare; he would sound the alarm, and the mystery of Number Nine might become darker than ever, and the trail

take on new proportions which lengthen until the end might be hidden in a future full of danger and death.

"He shall not escape me! None ever entirely get away from Phineas Tripp," cried the little ferret, as he reached the hallway to see something which lay on the lowest step.

Instinctively he sprang forward and picked it up, and as he bent toward the light and turned it over and over in his hands, his eyes got a sudden flash of triumph.

He had picked up a dagger, a knife with a long slender blade and a black hilt—a genuine Karan, such as he had seen when he looked at the one which had given to the city the mystery of Royal Legare's bouse.

Tripp went away. He let himself out of the house, and stood for half a second on the sidewalk.

A man crossed the street ahead of him and vanished. A child darted from an adjoining alley and looking at the detective a moment started to flee when Phineas called her.

She looked again and came forward timidly.

"Be you a cop?" said she, her face white and fright visible in her eyes.

"What if I were not, child?"

"There's a man—"

She stopped and looked again at the detective and then toward the alley's mouth.

"What is up?"

"He seems to be dying, shot by somebody in the alley," was the reply. "He staggered into the house by chance and mother is sick abed, and I—I am the only one worth a penny of us all."

"Where is he? Show me," said Phineas, in tones of command.

The child turned toward the alley and led him to a house the appearance of which betokened poverty.

"We live here. He was lying on the floor with his teeth set hard, swearing in a language we had never heard. Go in, sir."

The little ferret needed no invitation, but opened the door and went in.

As he crossed the threshold something moved in one corner and a woman rose from the bed of rags.

"He's in the next room, sir," she cried, pointing excitedly toward another room. "He is the man who staggered in here almost frightened us to death. In there you'll find him."

Phineas crossed the room and reached the door.

He felt that a few pieces of planks separated him from his prey. He knew what desperation meant; he knew his own strength and had compared his abbreviated physique with the suppleness and strength of the man from Barcelona.

But for all this he laid his hand on the door and, revolver in grip, opened it.

In another moment he was in the room beyond. It was dark and he stepped. The child had run to the woman on the couch and buried her white face in her bosom.

All at once the voice of Phineas Tripp was heard.

"Bring a light, child," it said.

The woman sprang out of bed and snatched up the lamp, and Phineas took it from her fevered hands.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OUT OF THE DARK.

PROVIDED with the light, Phineas Tripp advanced and stopped in the middle of the room.

He saw there, lying on the floor and with his face turned toward him, Vijal Savalli, the man from Barcelona.

At first the little ferret thought him preparing for another cat-like spring like the one which he had made on the stairs in his nest; but as he passed the lamp closer, he saw that the Spaniard had left the trail and that he was already a corpse!

The look in Savalli's eyes was lusterless; his hands had dropped at his side and he was as dead as a mummy.

The woman who had followed Phineas to the door shrunk back with a cry and the child ran back to the bed and buried her little white face in the scant covering.

The detective stooped and held the light very close to Savalli's face.

He passed his hand over it and to his horror the waxed mustache came off with the move, falling to the floor, where it rested alongside the yellowish cheek.

"That's strange!" cried Phineas.

But what made him look again? Why did his eyes bulge from his head, and why did he press the lamp closer still to the cold face, and suddenly turn as, if he wondered if the woman and her offspring were at the door!

"Great God! beaten for once! Who would have dreamed of this?" he exclaimed. "Who could have guessed the secret of that person's sex?"

It had come to Phineas Tripp in the shape of a revelation which actually staggered him; it had dawned upon him so suddenly that he had been

deprived of breath, and, as the saying goes, one could have knocked him down with a feather.

He went back and faced the woman in the other room.

"Don't go in there till I come back," he said. She caught his arm.

"Was it true?—Did that person speak the truth when I heard the last words?"

"What were they?"

"I was dreaming when the door opened and he came in. I was caught by a hand which looked like a woman's, and lips were pressed close to my ear. Give me a room to die in," they said. "I have been wounded, but I have the means on my person. The game is out! Woman, you won't refuse a sister a room in which to pass off the stage of action?"

"I pointed to yon room, hardly knowing what I did, and I was alone."

Phineas Tripp nodded.

"It is true, but don't disturb her."

With feelings which we will not attempt to analyze, the little ferret pushed back under the lamps of New York.

He did not stop until he opened the door of the den near Broadway and then he looked in amazement on two men who sat there, one with his hands clutching at the table, the other with a quiet smile on his face.

They were Silas Tracer and Royal Legare.

"At last," said Legare, as his gaze fell upon Phineas Tripp. "You are the evil genius of my career. Next to Savalli you are the man who will drag me to the shadow of the noose."

Phineas advanced and stood before Legare.

"She is dead!" said he, looking the prisoner in the face. "I have just left her."

Royal Legare fell back, looking at the detective, while Tracer looked too, but from other motives.

"It was a well kept secret," continued Phineas. "You know all about it, Legare. You knew that Vijal Savalli was a woman."

"Jehosaphat!" cried Silas Tracer. "A woman? The hands were all right—they were soft as silk and always gloved—but the strength and the cunning—that belonged to a man!"

Royal Legare for a moment said nothing.

Phineas Tripp took from his bosom a dagger which he laid on the table.

"That is the other one. You will see that it has not a hollow hilt."

Legare looked at the blade a moment and then turned once more to the little ferret.

"Did she kill herself?" he asked.

"Yes, for the little wound I inflicted would not have finished the game for her," and in a few words which were intently listened to, Phineas detailed his adventure.

"It was a well-kept secret," said Legare. "I met her in London after we came back from the Continent. The real Vijal Savalli had a sister who was his counterpart in many ways. They were twins, and when we—Orall Lagone and I—returned to England, I learned from this sister that Vijal had been killed in a duel in Paris, and that she, who, disguised in men's apparel, had been one of the seconds, held, with the three others, the secret of the duel and his death. She confessed that already the lips of two of those people were silent, and said that she was on the trail of the third."

"She went away after that and I missed her for three months. When she came back she appeared to me in men's clothes, and the very image of her brother. She had found the other man, and no doubt had killed him with the Savalli stroke. Orall Lagone never suspected the substitution. He was thrown into her presence after that often for months, but to him she was Vijal Savalli."

"We became as close friends as her brother and I had been. She seemed to possess the fascinating powers of the serpent and I fell unresistingly under them. The secret was ours and we might have been happy but for the discovery, when we had been some years in this country, that Marcus Monk, the man whose agents had shadowed me in Europe, was in New York. The person I called Savalli discovered this, too, for I had told her all about my life and she was determined that some day we would become man and wife without a shadow in our pathway."

"For me to look into her eyes under the spell of her dark beauty and cunning, was to wish for that day, and there the dark, damnable plot had birth. We hatched out the plot against Marcus Monk. We laid the wires for the game which was to clear the way and enable us to reach the goal. You two men with all your cunning have not guessed the whole of the plot, and were I to stop here you would forever be in the dark."

"Marcus Monk was rich and my own fortunes were failing. I knew that Oliver Dustan held in trust for Rana, the daughter, fifty thousand dollars, and that a large sum lay in the Bank of England subject to his orders, or those of his heirs. Now," Royal Legare leaned forward and smiled, "Savalli was to marry Rana Monk!"

The detectives started.

"That was the other play. If she had not escaped from Cloman's hotel—if we had been a little swifter with our plays, she would ere this

be the wife of—of the woman I was to marry! As a man, Savalli would have gone to England and laid claim to his wife's inheritance and after awhile both Rana and her 'husband' would have 'vanished.'

The man actually smiled as he spoke.

"I played my part of the game as that man knows," he went on, glancing at Silas Tracer. "He came down upon me with the accursed chain complete. He threw upon my table to-night a bit of brass wheel which fixes upon me a crime but little suspected by the authorities of this city. I never sailed in the Crusader. That was Savalli's thought. She could plan and execute with the vim and cunning of a Vidocq. The Crusader went to sea with a deadly machine going in my state-room, therefore Olsen Bromann did not come back to New York with a lie on his lips. Royal Legare would have vanished and Julia Savalli would have got a husband with another name.

"What more do you want of me? You know the rest. You have ferreted out the guilty. I am the one left for the vengeance of the law, since Phineas Tripp says that he has just looked into the dead face of 'Vijal Savalli.' I wrote the note left in the hilt of the dagger which did the deed. Savalli nicked the hilt and I dropped at the foot of the stairs on the night of the 10th the glove which Orall Lagone found there. My ring was in it. In short, gentlemen, you see before you the wielder of the black-hilted Karan—and this is the hand which dealt against Marcus Monk the Savalli stroke!"

The palm of Legare's hand lay uppermost on the table and his eyes were riveted on the two ferrets.

Phineas Tripp smiled.

He was at the end of the dark puzzle, and as he thought of the triumph which the newspapers would spread broadcast over the city and thence across the Continent, his thoughts went back to a little child who was waiting for the day of vengeance with all the impatience and desire of one grown up.

"It was Savalli who found Coppers at the safe, wasn't it?" he suddenly asked.

"It was Savalli! She went to the old house that night. She found the burglar there, and then came the swift life-taking stroke which she learned from her brother, the real Vijal."

That seemed enough, and an hour later, when the two ferrets were alone in the little den, Phineas Tripp said:

"That that mystery should remain till the very close unsuspected—that is what worries me, Silas."

The city overlooked it in the splendid triumph which came out to the credit of the twin shadows.

People believed that all along Tripp and Tracer thought that "Savalli" was a woman, and the detectives did not disabuse the public mind on this score.

Time came—and it was not very long after the denouement of Number Nine—when Garish Legare, thanks to the love and devotion of Miss Lyra Lockwood, came out of his retreat and married the girl who had stood by him through thick and thin. He came back to his friends a new man, and, strengthened in many a purpose, and with the watchful love of Lyra thrown about him, he rose to heights almost sublime.

The law dealt with the last man of the crime, and Royal Legare soon followed Orall Lagone into the dark beyond, but by the hands of sleepless justice.

Miss Rana Monk succeeded in possessing herself of the immense fortune which her father had saved; and after forcing a good share of it upon Phineas Tripp and Silas Tracer, she vanished quietly, disappeared, and settling down in an inland city miles from the scene of her bereavement, married, and tried to see nothing but happiness beyond the shadow of the past.

Little Josie, Coppers's *protegee*, but really the lost child of Orall Lagone, became a handsome woman, and Tripp and Tracer still keep from her the secret which might sorrow her life—the fact that her father and her protector, both of them, were once men of crime.

The famous firm of spotters is still in existence; and while Phineas and Silas work together, bringing the guilty to justice, they often recall the celebrated case of Royal Legare and the dark mystery of Number Nine.

As Bobbles says, it proved "the biggest feather in their caps."

THE END.

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